

지갑송 퓨전 판타지 장편소설

레벨업하는 몬스터 1

A Monster Who Levels Up

– 레벨업하는 몬스터 –

- Part 4 -

-Author-

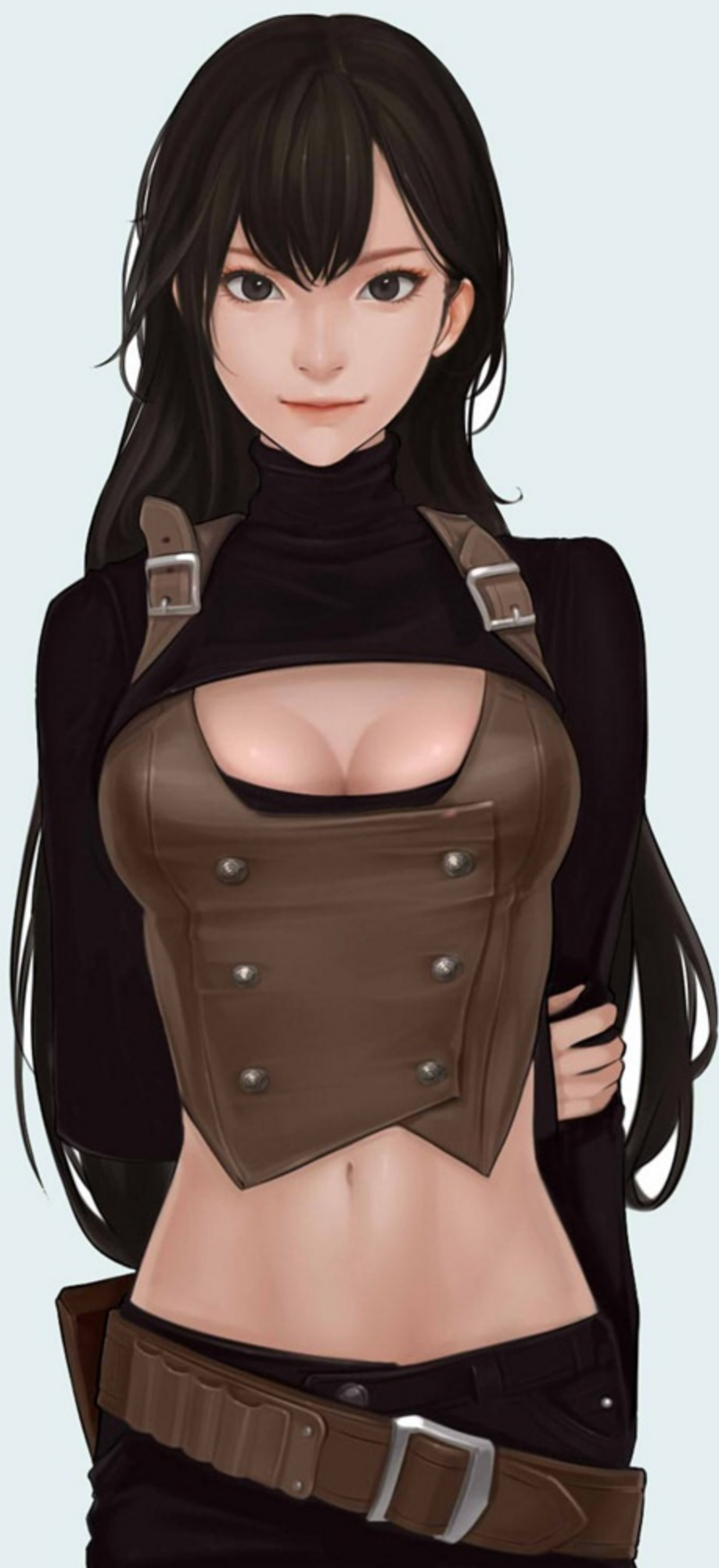
Jee Gab Song

[Fantasy-Books]

Hazeline



Kim Yu-Rin





CHAPTER 92

PROGRESSION (1)

“I am the Orc Blacksmith.”

This declaration caused the Korean peninsula as well as the whole world to boil over. Since the fame of the Orc Blacksmith was already widespread throughout the planet, Kim Sae-Jin had become the hottest topic in the world.

Joo Ji-Hyuk, Yi Hye-Rin and Kim Yu-Rin as well as those members of the Society and acquaintances who had no idea fell into quite a huge vortex of shock; meanwhile, reactions from the local media and the public were quite varied and colourful, to say the least. Among them, were people who couldn't just believe it, some who were utterly amazed by it, and some who criticised and condemned him.

But what hurt him the most were those critical opinions of some that began with, “just how much enjoyment and sense of superiority did he derive while hiding his identity?”

Sae-Jin felt so, so embarrassed. He obviously had a valid reason why he had to conceal his identity, but whenever he read those articles, cold perspiration formed on his backside while his head went numb.

– *“All the information has been compiled, but... it seems that, for now, it'll be better for us to wait, sir.”* (Kim Yu-Sohn)

While all this was happening, enough dirt on Kim Hahn-Seol and his backers had been uncovered – the information on all the corrupt things he did in order to achieve his ambitions. Although over half of those crimes were well past the statute of limitations, but well, mass media wouldn't sweat over stuff like that.

“Right. We wait.”

Unfortunately, the huge chaos raised by Sae-Jin's press conference meant that it was not possible to bury this story with another one, not just yet.

The current situation had devolved to the point where even the most respected

newspapers and weekly publications – such as The Guardian, the Times, etc, etc – were busy tripping over one another just to get the story out first, while the rest of news items were getting buried away in ignorance. It was likely that, even if he exposed this information, it'd get ignored just like the others.

“This chaos, it might carry on for a while, right?”

– *“Yes, sir. It seems that way. Even if you hold more press conferences, this chaos won't die down, so perhaps it's better for you to take a couple of weeks of good rest, sir.”* (Kim Yu-Sohn)

“A good rest... Fuu-woo.”

Kim Sae-Jin let out a grand sigh while staring outside his window. As there was no sign of the noise created by the huge crowd of reporters right outside his house lessening any time soon, having a good rest was simply an impossibility at the moment.

– *“Oh, and Guild Master?”*

“...Yes?”

– *“Last night, I had a dream. It was seen from the eyes of a Vampire. And in the dream, the Vampire Lord is waking up.”*

The moment he heard those words, he swallowed down a lot of his saliva. Out of the blue, the Skill ‘Eyes of the Wolf’ activated all on its own, and his claws extended out sharply. His heart powerfully urged him on, strengthening the species-specific instincts.

“...How do we kill it?”

He muttered out without realising it. It was a simple, instinctive reaction.

– *“...Sir?”*

“Ah, it's nothing. I'll call you back later.”

Regaining his sanity back thanks to Kim Yu-Sohn's panicked voice, Sae-Jin quickly hung up the phone. However, his madly pounding heart showed no signs of slowing down at all. And those damn reporters camping outside his house, making so much

noise were only serving to irritate him even more.

“...Uh-whew.”

He let out another sigh and picked up his phone again. No matter what it took, he had to find a solution to these f*cking bastards outside who were preventing him from getting much-needed sleep.

“...Oh, is it you, Sae-Jung?”

The call connected even before the second ring ended. From the other side, he could hear a genuinely welcoming voice.



For a week after the press conference, Sae-Jin shut himself in the house. He refused every single interview request made by both the local and international media outlets while saying, “Later”.

Instead, testimonies of people witnessing a strange Monster began emerging between the articles related to Sae-Jin every now and then, before promptly getting buried away once more.

The unidentified Monster, its moonlight-coloured fur shining so beautifully – yet, leaving behind only the dark silhouette when the eyes try to locate it.

What the witnesses saw was the sight of the creature kicking and gliding in the air, leaping between buildings and mountains like a bird. Although, it was nothing more than a moment’s blur, for those ‘Knights’ who accidentally saw it, they just could not forget that mysterious Monster.

Of course, the culprit himself couldn’t care any less even if he tried. He had to feel the wind on his face just to de-stress, like now – so why would he care about what others thought of him and become careful with his actions? That just didn’t fit with his current personality.

“...Hmm.”

Currently, Sae-Jin was in the ‘Wolf’ form, while sitting atop the peak of a mountain in the Monster field, studying the land below.

The newly-improved Wolf's field of view simply knew no limits and he could see not only the countless Monsters, but also the Knights doing their nightly hunts as well. And even the flow of Mana coming off from them could not escape his vision, either.

“*Yawn*~~”

Since none of them were Vampires, he had no interest in fighting any one of those weaklings. While yawning out, he flicked his claw out and that cancelled the magic spell of a Lich that was fighting a group of Knights afar.

Sae-Jin climbed down the mountain peak after confirming that the Knights, who briefly stopped their actions from the shock in order to figure out why the magic had been cancelled, rushing into the Lich to finish the Monster off.

Done with his stroll now, Sae-Jin returned to the cabin owned by Yu Sae-Jung.

The cabin that was located deep in the woods of Gangwon's Goseong-gun easily exceeded 7000 square feet in area alone, but it was still nothing more than one of the simple weekend getaway villas with a nice view Yu Sae-Jung owned. Actually, she didn't even know there was a place like this under her name until her butler informed her so.

And Kim Sae-Jin asked for Yu Sae-Jung's favour and as a result, ended up staying in this villa for the time being.

He couldn't help it, since his own house was virtually under siege at the moment, and it was also no better within the Society's grounds as that was completely open to the public; reporters had hidden themselves in the hotel and the theme park located there.

Of course, he could stay cooped up within the nap room of the HQ building, or even in the underground village, but changing to the Wolf or other Monster Forms there obviously caused problems, and also, he definitely didn't feel like living with Goblins in the underground village where sun literally didn't shine.

It didn't matter that he came here with a variety of reasons, because this place proved to be just perfect. The villa was located in the middle of a mountain, so not a single sign of people anywhere; as it was also right next to a lake, the air here was refreshing, too; most of all, there were no prying eyes to worry about.

However, the one thing he didn't fully expect, obviously...

“Oppa, where have you been?”

It was Yu Sae-Jung.

She approached him shyly while wearing a thin shirt with her black underwear peeking out a little and a really short hotpants. As if she had taken a shower just now, her cheeks were glowing and her hair moist.

“A stroll. But besides that, you still haven’t gone home yet? You said you’d be here for a couple of days, tops.” (Sae-Jin)

“...But this is my home already.” (Yu Sae-Jung)

She was the sole reason why he simply had to establish the routine of going out on a ‘stroll’ as the Lycanthrope for the past four days. He could only stay as a ‘human’ for 15 hours; so, as long as Yu Sae-Jung was around the house, he had to roam around outside for the rest 9.

“Just what kind of a stroll lasts that long?”

“Because I want to? But forget about that for now – when is Mister Hyun-Oh coming? Isn’t Mister Joo Ji-Hyuk coming here soon as well? Please call them and find out what’s happening. My phone died a sudden and horrible death not too long ago.”

“Oh, really? But uh, even I can’t... maybe something happened? I’m sure they are also busy doing all those interviews.”

Yu Sae-Jung locked into his eyes and lied with a straight face. She had already sent text messages that read, ‘do not come. I can handle it’, and well... she didn’t want Sae-Jin to know. After all, she was utterly determined to make things happen here.

“I’ve readied breakfast. Let’s go and eat.”

She then held Sae-Jin’s hand and guided him towards the dining table.



“How is it? Good?”

Yu Sae-Jung asked him while her eyes sparkled in hope.

“...Let me eat first.”

Unfortunately for her, he only just finished scooping out a spoonful of stir-fried rice and it wasn't even anywhere near his mouth yet.

Here was the reason why his stay here the last four days was comfortable and uncomfortable all at the same time.

From 9 o'clock in the evening to 6 in the morning, he had to roam outside for 9 hours in total which meant that his sleeping hours didn't line up with hers – but the rising hours did, so Yu Sae-Jung prepared breakfast and they always ate together.

It was the same during the day as well. Since there wasn't much to do, they would spar occasionally, then watch some TV, and then talk about trivial stuff for a while. Meanwhile, Yu Sae-Jung would stealthily approach him and engage in 'skinship' – such as, leaning her head on his shoulders, or using his lap as a pillow.

Whenever that happened... Kim Sae-Jin didn't stop her.

“Mm. It's salty.”

He chewed the fried rice for a bit before ruthlessly handing out his judgement. After his evolution to Lycanthrope, even his taste buds had sharpened up and most regular food just didn't taste good enough for him nowadays.

“Ah?! Really?”

Panicking a little, she quickly took a mouthful of the rice. According to her own tongue, it wasn't bad at all, but still...

“...Ah, you weren't kidding... It's an honest mistake. Sorry. Should I redo it?”

“No, it's fine. Don't worry about it, really.”

Well, it wasn't as if he'd chase after delicious food for the rest of his life, anyways. Sae-Jin shoved all the fried rice down his throat in a hurry. And his plate became empty in less than three minutes, all the while Yu Sae-Jung gazed at him with a deeply moved expression.

“...*Buuurrrp.*”

And then, he burped out loudly. But well, as the love-struck mind possessed power to transform even things like that into something utterly cool, Yu Sae-Jung burst out into a fit of giggles, commenting on how honest he was.

After the meal had come to an end, Yu Sae-Jung followed Sae-Jin as he headed towards the door again.

“I’m heading out for a while.”

“Uh? But it’s only 11 now? And you just came back not too long ago...”

Yu Sae-Jung asked with a surprised face. The repeat broadcast of a talk show he starred in would be on air pretty soon...

“I’ll be back at 5 o’clock.”

Kim Sae-Jin didn’t say much, only smiling gently at her while standing on the doorway.

That was enough to appease her unhappiness of his sudden departure. Indeed, Yu Sae-Jung said goodbye with a smile much wider than his.



His schedule today was simple. He planned to roam the Monster field in all of his Monster Forms, and if he ran into a strong-looking Monster, then he’d kill it and absorb its Mana Stone. Then, he would meet up with Kim Yu-Sohn on the appointed time here in the field and have a chat with him, before changing into the Hero Orc and head off to the Orc village.

‘Hmm... They have grown big.’

Sae-Jin felt accomplished whenever he took in the sights of the Hero Orc village that had clearly grown into a town. Although it wasn’t cool to hear all those pig-like squeals coming out from this place instead of the Korean he taught them before, but still, this village had become a home where these mild-mannered Orcs could live safely.

They had divided their roles clearly, the huts built by the Orcs themselves were more than passable, and there seemed to be more than 300 households here – seeing all these Orcs and their growth, he started sensing the feelings of joy creep up on his mind.

It was then. An unexpected alert window popped up at this completely unexpected moment.

[Condition complete: the mindset of a Chieftain (2/3)]

- Upon completion of one more condition, the host will evolve into the Orc Chieftain.
- A container where warriors' souls can dwell has been created in the host's body. Maximum of (1~5) souls of Monsters killed in battle can be stored, depending on the strength of the Monster. The Monster souls will add varied bonus Stat points to the host's overall power depending on the original holder.

“...Mm?”

The Orc tilted his head.

As he was checking out the alert window with a surprised face, the gates of the village creaked open and a person entered.

It was Kim Yu-Rin. It was as if she was also a resident in this place, judging by her familiarity.

She didn't carry any particular expression, only to find the Hero Orc and her whole face brightened up, quickly strolling towards where he was.

“But, no sparring today?”

The Hero Orc kept his distance and narrowed his brows. Yu-Rin then faintly smiled while pointing at her back pocket.

“I know. It's just that, there are couple of Orcs who got injured while going out on a hunt. I brought along some potions to treat them.”

“ ... ”

The Orc stared at her with a complicated expression. Her words implied that she had

been often looking after these Orcs until now.

A woman who took care of Monsters. The press would have a field day if they ever found out.

“In other words, yes, it means that I don’t have any interest in you. On top of that, we Raven Knights Order has decided to protect this village from poachers, too.”

Completely forgetting about her uber-bright expressions of only a few seconds ago, she tried to look totally indifferent while walking past the Orc.

The Orc chuckled to himself slightly and turned around to follow her.

‘...Hey, he’s following me?’

Kim Yu-Rin’s lips quivered after she took a quick glance at her back.

She thought that, the ‘pushing and pulling’ tactic had been a success.

CHAPTER 93

PROGRESSION (2)

Kim Sae-Jin spent his time sparring with and taking care of other Orcs together with Kim Yu-Rin, here in the village. Since Orcs were naturally drawn towards powerful individuals, so in his eyes, she had become quite a charming woman, which led to him forgetting about the passage of time; and it was already very late at night when they finally separated.

“Oh yeah~. It’s all good...”

The clear illumination from the full moon high up on the dark and cloudless night sky coolly bathed the ground below.

While savouring the brilliance of the falling moonlight, Sae-Jin moved his feet. The light seemed to linger on with every footstep he left behind.

“...”

And before he knew it, his dazed stroll brought him back to the villa. There seemed to be an aura of loneliness creeping around this huge house with all of its lights off.

He grabbed the door handle and slowly pushed forward.

SFX for noisy hinges

Past the cold, indifferent noise, he saw the wide open living room. Now that he saw it in the darkness, he realised just how unnecessarily huge this place was.

Tthak-

When he closed the door, he sensed a person’s presence, towards the living room’s couch. Was she pretending to be asleep, or did he wake her up just now? Grinning slightly, he approached Yu Sae-Jung on the couch.

“...Are you awake?” (Sae-Jin)

Yu Sae-Jung didn't even budge, her face deeply buried in the cushions of the couch. Since he could hear her heartbeat increasing rapidly, she was indeed faking it, but was she angry at him being so late?

"...Hmph."

Unfortunately for her, Sae-Jin simply chose to go to his room instead. He didn't feel like humouring her at all if he could help it...

"Eu-eum... Oppa, you came back?"

At the same time, Yu Sae-Jung slowly raised her head up. She pretended to be woken up just now by keeping her eyes half-shut, while reaching out and holding his wrist tightly.

"Were you asleep?" (Sae-Jin)

"Mm. Because, the guy who said he'd be back by 5... hadn't come until 1 in the morning, you see."

"..."

He sat down on the couch and while smiling apologetically, brushed her hair.

Maybe the moonlight pouring down in the darkness was to blame, but for some reason, she looked especially pretty today. On top of this, she even exuded this unfamiliar sensuality as well. Half-open eyes, deeply blushing cheeks, and most of all, a very suggestive attire she had on. She was wearing only a thin one-piece night gown and whenever she moved her body, Sae-Jin could spy on the sight of her unexpectedly rich cleavage.

"...Why were you so late? You said you'd be home early." (Yu Sae-Jung)

Inside this darkened room, she continued to speak, her voice sounding weak.

"There was this thing I had to take care of, and I ended up being a little late." (Sae-Jin)

"It's not 'a little' but 'a lot'. Let's get that straight." (Yu Sae-Jung)

"..."

Yu Sae-Jung complained as she interlocked her fingers with his. Since he felt apologetic, he didn't offer any resistance, and she kept on playing with his hands.

"By the way, Oppa. Did you know? It's already been over two years since we first met."

As if it came to her just now, she mentioned this fact 'in passing'.

"It's been that long?" (Sae-Jin)

"We met during the early spring, 2nd year of high school, and I'm twenty now, so yeah, it just about checks out."

After thinking back for a bit, Sae-Jin suddenly broke out in short laughter.

"I remember now. You were quite rude back then. You seemed so expectant but when I introduced myself as a Hunter, your face became really distorted..."

"N, no way... I, I may have behaved like that before, but I was naïve back then. Now, I'm a lot... different? I get to hear a lot nowadays that my personality has changed, you know? It's all because of you, Oppa."

"Now? Hmm..."

He feigned falling into a deep dilemma, and sure enough, Yu Sae-Jung began throwing a tantrum, telling him to stop teasing her.

"What? Your first impression of me was that I was an impolite girl?" (Yu Sae-Jung)

"No, an impolite rich girl."

"...Hah."

And so, from those simple and ill-timed words, the pleasant memories began to bloom brightly in their minds.

When the two of them met for the first time, when they went out on a hunt together, when Kim Sae-Jin 'revealed' his identity to her, etc, etc... Time quickly flowed as they talked and soon, they had arrived at the day of Yu Sae-Jung's coming of age ceremony.

"And when Oppa tried to take advantage of me..." (Yu Sae-Jung)

“Mm? Oh, uh, at the time I was...”

“Let me finish first. Back then, I said I’d wait until Oppa truly likes me from the depth of your heart and left, right? I was such a world-class moron back then, you know?”
(Yu Sae-Jung)

She then stopped her words, and as if she had decided on something, got right next to him while swallowing down her saliva.

“That night when I was leaving, I was like, I am so cool, can’t you see... But, from the following week since then, I’ve been regretting it. Every night when I try to sleep, I regret what I’ve done, I kick away my duvet, and then regret that instead... Oppa knows this too, don’t you? That I like Oppa a lot. I just couldn’t stand it when I think about that great chance I messed up.”

As the atmosphere turned a bit ‘strange’, Sae-Jin ended up scratching the blameless cheeks of his; meanwhile, Yu Sae-Jung took a deep breath.

“That’s why, I’m going to say this out aloud. I really, really don’t think I can wait for Oppa anymore. Can’t you just help me somehow?”

“...”

“Well, look. I’m exaggerating a bit but I dream of dreams with Kim Sae-Jin in them seven days a week. And in them, when Kim Sae-Jin hates me, it turns into a nightmare, and if he likes me, then it’s the sweetest dream there can be.”

Kim Sae-Jin didn’t say a word while hearing her calm and composed confession – because, he could definitely sense her ardent feelings for him contained within her trembling voice.

“And when Oppa meets with another woman, even though I don’t say anything, things become really difficult for me. I struggle to fall asleep that night, and I have nightmares, too.”

While she gazed at him, Yu Sae-Jung did her best to disguise her restlessness with a smile.

“...So, that’s why, can’t we... maybe start seeing each other? I... I heard from Hye-Rin Unni that people do fall in love while dating.”

As she peered into his eyes, her heart beat away like crazy in her chest.

“Even if Oppa is not ready, I’ll... try harder. Honestly... isn’t it true that you won’t find other woman like me anywhere else, right?”

She cautiously and clearly spoke all the words she wanted to say to him until now during this opportunity.

However – Kim Sae-Jin maintained his silence. And Yu Sae-Jung’s body quivered from the fear of being rejected.

A thick silence descended on the living room, accompanied by the heavy moonlight.

Five minutes passed by, and then, ten.

Yu Sae-Jung could not endure this silence anymore, and so, completely disregarding whatever consequences there could be, threw herself aggressively into his arms.

She wrapped her arms around his neck and planted her lips on his. Although she had jumped in without a thought for what would happen next, her lips were still quivering from that fear of rejection.

But fortunately for her, Sae-Jin did not push her away. No, he gently wrapped his arms around her waist, instead. That gave her the confidence and ever so slightly, she slid her tongue between his lips.

Their tongues intertwined, wetting each other’s mouths.

Unlike Yu Sae-Jung who only learned about romance through novels, Sae-Jin was much more accomplished with his kisses. Of course, he too didn’t have any experience, but he simply let the instincts of the Lycanthrope, the creature well versed in the pursuit of all things pleasurable, take over the proceedings.

While their lips were locked tight, he touched her through the gown. He felt the silkiness of her skin and the perfect curvature of her body through the thin fabric. As expected of a Knight, her body was firm and smooth.

“Ha, ah...”

She breathed out restlessly and actively writhed her body, so he could touch her even

more. And before long, the hand touching her gown began to dig into her bare flesh.

“...Fuu-woo...”

The more he desired her, the more she clung onto him. She breathed hotly near his ear, as if to fan the flames of his urges even more.

And to show that she had succeeded, Sae-Jin’s suddenly became a lot more harsher. He didn’t simply undress her, he ripped the thin gown off and then began leaving behind his marks all over her bare flesh as if he was conquering her.

“...Ouch!”

She felt a great deal of pain, as if an untamed animal was biting her, but she endured it. But even such pain was temporary. Her awakening body replaced all the painful parts into zones of pleasure.

...

The time, two in the morning. When the moon was at her highest; when, allegedly, people would be at their most vulnerable mindset.

The living room couch became stained with the odd heat and saliva as two people sought to fill the void.



He opened his eyes. No, his eyes opened by themselves. A woman had woken him up after continuously squirming within his arms.

“ ... ”

The world was still dark outside the window.

Kim Sae-Jin looked down on the naked figure in his arms and let out a long sigh. The memories of the deed itself was a bit of blur, but the sensations remained still so real. In the end, his desires won over his reasoning.

‘Oh, well... ’

However, he quickly shook away the feelings of regret. What's done was done already. Of course, the effects of the full moon had played some part in the things unfolding this way, but really, he had an inkling that things might turn out this way – yet, still ended up setting himself up.

And well, wasn't Sae-Jung a wonderful woman, to begin with? She was pretty, had great abilities, and not to mention, her background could be called the best in South Korea.

'...But why is she making that face?'

A loose smile broke out on Sae-Jin's face.

Yu Sae-Jung's face that showed how happy she was left a deep impression on him. He could tell that she was definitely asleep, yet there was a thick smile on her lips, and he even heard her rhythmic breathing that somehow sounded as if she was singing. Looked like she was enjoying a really good dream...

That appearance of hers proved to be quite alluring, so Sae-Jin embraced her real tightly. However, a pair of soft sensations directly touching his skin ended up activating his instincts once more.

Again, she was still in a deep slumber. As it was her first time, she must've been exhausted, but... he was thinking that, since she looked so happy, doing it one more time wouldn't be a problem at all.

He assumed a slightly crooked smile and began twisting his body bit by bit. It was time for the second round to begin.

...

As an aside, Yu Sae-Jung did wake up in the middle and in an unbridled panic, ended up scratching the hell out of his back.



Since then, three weeks went by.

During these three weeks, Sae-Jin got to know intimately just how being newly-weds felt like. They ate together every day and also, made love regardless of time every day

as well. Now that he was no longer held back by constraints, he jumped on Yu Sae-Jung whenever he got the chance. So much so, she even stopped counting how many times they did it in a day.

Whenever his instincts took over, he pulled her in like a violent wild beast, but she welcomed him with a wide open smile, instead.

And so, the three weeks of honeymoon came to an end with them becoming official 'lovers' and Kim Sae-Jin left behind a slightly saddened Yu Sae-Jung to make his return.

The thing was, no matter how hot, three weeks were sufficient enough for the news to cool down. Stories related Sae-Jin had gradually faded away, and eyeing this opportunity, he let the proverbial bomb go off.

[Minister in Charge of Monster Affairs, Kim Hahn-Seol: seduced by the corruption of financial world...] [Thrice-elected member of the Assembly, Kim Yo-Hahn, illegal campaign funds...]

The information on Kim Hahn-Seol and his backers – Chaebols and National Assembly members – were exposed to the public. And so, the powerful momentum of the winds of revenge began to gather slowly.

– I stake the life I've lived until now – all those reports in the media are untrue!!

Kim Hahn-Seol and his backers showed off the expected response – a categorical denial. They were acting like this with the belief that they could escape out of this predicament – but that was because only a part of the information had been revealed to the public yet. The more they struggled, the deeper their graves would become, however.

“Miss Yu Baek-Song, have you seen the news?”

– “...”

Yu Baek-Song didn't say a word. She was probably trying to remain respectful towards the superior officer she had been taking orders from until now.

“It'll be troublesome for me if you don't reply. After all, I only started this matter because of you, Miss Yu Baek-Song.”

– *“Hey, why are you saying this thing is for me? I...”*

“Let’s discuss the details later on when we meet up, as I’m quite busy at the moment. When can we meet?”

– *“Huh? Uh, I’m also busy nowadays, so...”*

“You don’t have anything lined up for July 14th, no? Let’s meet on that date.”

He could hear her hold her breath over the line. Since he had installed a ton of spyware as well as inserted a few spies in the midst of the SID, finding out about this much wasn’t a problem at all.

– *“No, no wait, that’s not...”*

“Ah, I just received another call. Hold on a sec. I’ll call you back some other time.”

He confirmed the name shown on the LCD screen and hurriedly changed his conversation partner.

– *“Oh, Mister Kim Sae-Jin. It’s a relief that you answered your phone. I’m Kim Hahn-Seol. I saw that important announcement three weeks ago with great interest. I have to say, that sure was something else.”*

The call was from Kim Hahn-Seol. He sounded quite relaxed for a guy whose dirty laundry was hung out to dry for all to see.

“...Yes, well. Thank you.”

Kim Sae-Jin also maintained his calm.

– *“Huhuh. And that is why, shouldn’t we reschedule the cancelled meeting? After all, with the revelation of some unsavoury matters, it could not be helped at the time, no? For you, I’ve readied quite a few nice little presents, you see.”*

Kim Sae-Jin stayed silent.

He just had realised it – Kim Hahn-Seol’s ‘neutral’ aura he felt back then was actually this – he was the type of a person who would readily burn his bridges without hesitation if it meant fulfilling his ambitions.

– *“Keum. This is actually a secret, but well, I was never really convinced of you being implicated in the tax fraud from the very beginning. Such things don’t appear on the surface unless someone wills it, no? That’s why I asked one of my close associates to look into the matter.”*

That was how this man was able to sell off his so-called comrades. Kim Hahn-Seol probably had felt in his bones, that now was the time he changed the ship he was sailing on.

“...Is that right?”

– *“Indeed. And it’s definitely a political manoeuvring, this whole ordeal. Since I’ve uncovered those behind this plot, why don’t we meet and share this info...”*

Sae-Jin let this rather well-composed pleading enter one ear and flow out the other while carrying a cold smile.

Just how many people did Kim Hahn-Seol betray in this manner as this guy climbed up to his current position?

Hearing this man talk, whatever little speck of sympathy Sae-Jin had disappeared. So, he said some non-committal replies and hung up the phone.

SFX for the doorbell chime

As soon as he ended the call, someone rang his doorbell.

SFX for a door abruptly opening

Even before he could say, “who is it”, Yu Sae-Jung opened the door and lightly walked into his house.

“Mister Kim Sae-Jin? Your lover has arrived~.”

“...Hah.”

Kim Sae-Jin let out a long sigh and stood up, all the while thinking, *Is she trying to cause a scandal or something?*



With the awakening of the ruler of all Vampires, the Vampire Lord, there was no longer a leeway with the time anymore. The decision on who would fill the role of the future ruler of the species had to be made before the current, dying Lord kicked the bucket. And before even that could happen, *they* had to connect all three Dead Fissures within the Monster field together.

Now pressured by the lack of time, Bathory had no choice but to do something quite rare. And that was to combine the might of her House and that of the 'el Las' House and its leader, the kid named 'Thsironen'.

"Hey, kid. Let's be honest here, there isn't enough time for us to wait for you to grow up. So, although we're working together, the position of the Lord shall..." (Prillani Bathory)

"Let's discuss that matter later. As the heads of our respective Houses, we are on the equal position here, after all." (Thsironen el Las)

Bathory gritted her teeth. Honestly, this little tyke was...

"First of all, you can't connect the portals because you don't have the artificial heart anymore, right? While the date our Lord has spoken of is fast approaching as we speak." (el Las)

"...Well, technically, it isn't exactly like that, though?" (Bathory)

"Does that mean you don't need the aid of my people, then? If that's the case, I'll be on my way." (el Las)

"...Now hold it, right there. For now, I'll listen to what you have to say."

The skin and hair that were paler than palest white, and the pair of blood-red eyes that contrasted such paleness – possessing such appearance that even other Vampires would find creepy, Thsironen maintained composure even in front of Bathory.

"For now, those Nosferatus are the most suspicious ones so let's combine our powers. Then, we open the portal, and then, we wait for the next command of our Lord. Thankfully, the Lord will be able to extend his life by another six months or so. Let's decide on the rest after everything's been resolved." (el Las)

Bathory's forehead creased. It was like, as if this little tyke had the ambition of becoming the next Lord, and thus, this boy was proving to be difficult to deal with.

"...Fuu."

But there was very little she could do, at least for now. Even if it was for a short while, she needed a helper, after her truly incompetent foolish servants had messed up everything.

Also, if she didn't like the way things were going, then...

'I'll just kill this little f*cker.'

Bathory lightly nodded her head.

CHAPTER 94

CHANGES IN THE DAILY LIFE, PART 2 (1)

‘Korea’s Proud Son.’

That was the title for this week’s article on one of the world’s most influential publications, the ‘Times’.

The main character was Kim Sae-Jin. Describing him as a ‘man who possessed a variety of unexplainable abilities’, the article went in-depth with introducing the public to the road he had walked on to get to where he was now.

As one would expect from the article focusing solely on Sae-Jin, it brought about a much more explosive amount of reaction from the populace of South Korea, than compared to the USA.

And by riding on the wave of this fame, The Monster passed the Guild evaluation and thus became a full-fledged Guild in the process. Also, the price of the land the ‘Guild’ was on, as well as the value of the surrounding lands as the tourist attraction, reached heights previously unseen.

Plus, many famous celebrities from different parts of the world personally flew over to Korea in order to meet with Sae-Jin, saying he was someone who could create ‘treasures’ as the Orc Blacksmith. Hell, there were some individuals who wielded incredible influence in the world resorting to pressuring the government personnel for a chance to meet with him.

Whenever he received these requests for a meeting, though, Sae-Jin checked out that person’s personality first. In other words, he didn’t meet with everyone. He figured that, if he kept on refusing, then people might start ‘hating’ on him, and if he met them all, then it’d go on forever.

And so, for the next three weeks or so, Sae-Jin held many meetings with celebrities which started off with him meeting the greatest Knight in the USA named ‘Ropetess’; from there, he met the 3rd Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, a world-famous Elf songstress which even made him cower timidly, etc, etc... Sae-Jin got to build personal connections with lots of celebrities.

Initially, meeting up with all these celebrities he saw on TV and newspapers proved to be really cool, but as it continued on and on, both his body and mind became fatigued.

It couldn't be helped, as those who succeeded meeting with Sae-Jin were all very happy, but those who failed to do so were busy slagging him off for being an arrogant prick.

Finally, using the excuse of The Monster becoming a Guild and thus its administration requiring a specialised and dedicated touch, Sae-Jin stepped away from the Guild Master position, while also installing Jo Hahn-Sung as his proxy. He then told everyone that he'd be taking a long break from all the stressful work and began a NEET-like existence in his house, inwardly feeling quite pleased with himself.

Even though there were Knights who were wholeheartedly waiting for the Orc Blacksmith to release new weapons, Sae-Jin decided to let them wait for a while. Most of all, it seemed there were too many idiots who thought that his continued show of 'goodwill' had become their right or some such.

Instead of feeling grateful for him presenting his creations to the public, these bastards were busy spewing crap like Sae-Jin was getting lazy and lackadaisical and whatever, when he broke the promise of releasing two weapons a month.

It was because of these morons, he decided to rest for at least three months or so. Of course, he'd every now and then post a few smartly-chosen words on his SNS profile, too.

"...Hmm."

Anyways. Currently, Sae-Jin was savouring a cup of coffee within his own house, not in the Guild's HQ building, glancing through a newspaper while enjoying the early morning of his sabbatical.

[Kim Hahn-Seol, after saying he'd bet his entire life, resigns from his ministerial position after the continued revelation of corruption.] [Is the vice chairman of Great Wisdom, Kim Jong-Hyuk, also implicated in this corruption scandal?]

Kim Hahn-Seol – a man resembling an onion with layers upon layers of dark secrets continuously being revealed. It seemed that he'd be seeing the inside of a jail cell in a near future, while his backers were all getting mired in the scandal as well. No matter how one cut it, at this moment in time, one could definitely say that both Sae-Jin and

the Dawn Corporation had won this game outright.

[The Divine Beast type Soo-in Yu Baek-Song, appointed as the Commissioner of the Police.]

And the story he had been waiting for, the rise to power of a certain someone, was also printed on the side with small letters.

“It’s finally done~.”

He put the newspaper down while a satisfied smile showed up on his face. Now, even without him being there, the Guild would run smoothly, although that had been the case since the beginning anyways, and the idiots who didn’t know their place were being escorted into a prison one by one, so...

So, there was just one more issue he had to tackle now.

Vampires and his parents, as well as the truth about himself.

“Next week.”

Sae-Jin murmured to himself as he looked at the calendar. July 14th, the date he’d meet up with Yu Baek-Song.

Around the same time, he heard the sound of a door opening.

While carrying a smile on his lips, he waited for the woman to enter his arms.

“...You went out on a stroll again?” (Yu Sae-Jung)

Yu Sae-Jung walked in uneasy steps and sat on the couch before falling into his arms. She wore nothing other than a thin shirt over her naked form so the sensation transmitted to Sae-Jin was rather stimulating.

“It’s fine going outside while I’m still asleep, but can’t you be by my side when I’m about to wake up?” (Yu Sae-Jung)

“Why don’t you get dressed first?”

“Don’t wanna.”

She replied with a pout and lightly bit his neck.

“Honestly... Where does Oppa go every night? You don’t think about me who might wake up in the middle of sleep, right? Do you know how lonely it can get when when two suddenly becomes one?”

“...”

Now that his guilty conscience got poked, he couldn’t say anything so to change the topic, he switched on the TV instead.

–... This is an emergency alert. Near the city of Youngju, North Gyeongsang Province, the Monster ‘Arteramus’ has appeared.

Instead, he was greeted with a breaking news. Thankfully, it was a good enough topic to change the flow of this conversation.

“Why is there so much chaos in this country all of a sudden...” (Yu Sae-Jung)

Yu Sae-Jung made a worried expression as she looked on at the emergency broadcast. The news was showing the images of the bird-type Monster building a nest near the North Gyeongsang Province.

– The body of the Arteramus is believed to be bigger than the entrance to the Dead Fissure that appeared in the North Gyeongsang Province before; the experts have expressed their curiosity as to how such a Monster could exit from that Dead Fissure with its massive bulk.

An Arteramus was famous for being a difficult Monster to deal with. Nay, it transcended the level of merely being ‘difficult’ and firmly into the realm of impossibility, even.

The first time this thing appeared was around 13 years ago, and the unlucky host that time was Osaka, Japan. Appearing suddenly out of nowhere – as if it fell from the sky or something – this Monster bird used its powerful crow to cause the city to fall in utter chaos, and then using mysterious tentacles that grew on its body instead of fur, killed countless people.

– The Arteramus has been classified as a Boss level Monster. And the Raven Order that found the Monster first is forming a raid team centered around its Highest Tier Knight,

Miss Kim Yu-Rin.

As its classification said, it was a boss-level Monster in the similar concept as one would find in games, right down to how heaven-defyingly impossible it was to defeat this creature with one or two Knights only. Such powerful Monsters would show up once every year in different countries all around the world.

“It’s pretty close to our home, too... I hope they can subjugate it without much problem.” (Yu Sae-Jung)

Yu Sae-Jung pretended to be a helpless young girl and sneakily leaned her head against his chest. Sae-Jin simply stared at the top of her head for a bit before uttering out what was on his mind.

“By the way – aren’t you supposed to go to work by now?”

“...Haaah. Seriously?”

She gritted her teeth and glared at him. She was quite dumbstruck at the moment.

Sae-Jin still quietly studied her current appearance. It was as if she was trying to tell how peeved she was via her facial expressions – her brows were narrowed, her lips pouting.

That was why he suddenly snuck in with an unexpected kiss. She was so adorable at that moment, and he didn’t really feel like trying to appease her annoyance as well.

As she was annoyed by him, she resisted at first, but well. She was beginning to lose to his already-proficient movements.

“Mm... Mmm...”

Her eyes closed; she followed with her senses his hands that had become a lot more familiar with her lately and were busy roaming all over her body.

“Haaaa... ahh...”

Sae-Jin slowly lowered her down on the couch. Since there was only an over-sized shirt to get rid of, taking her clothes off proved to be quick and easy.

“Wait, I...”

But before they could go any further, Yu Sae-Jung became shy from the early morning sunlight shining down brightly, and pushed him slightly away.

“...You don’t have to hide such a wonderful body, you know?” (Sae-Jin)

Sae-Jin couldn’t understand her reaction at all.

“No, I mean, it’s just... If it’s too bright, I feel a bit shy...”

“ ... ”

Yu Sae-Jung’s face reddened deeply and covered up her chest with both of her arms. Sae-Jin’s brows narrowed but he still closed the curtains quickly.

Only then, she jumped into his arms.

And so, the morning’s activity resumed from there.



The following day.

“The Arteramus that appeared in Osaka was also classified as a Boss, but the one we’re going to face is suspected to be a lot more powerful than that one.”

Within the Raven Knights Order’s Team 1 conference room, the briefing was being held to hash out the subjugation detail for the Boss Monster that had finally appeared after a long while.

“Looking rather grotesque from any distance, the Arteramus resembles a jet-black rooster from afar, but when studied closely, it has something like tentacles rather than fur on its body. And the bad news is, these tentacles contain a ton of concentrated Mana and each one of them are strong and sharp enough to easily pierce the defenses of a Knight.” (Unknown Knight)

Tentacles grew from every part of its body, so the Arteramus possessed no blind spot in its direction of attack. That placed this bird into the category of the “really, unfairly cumbersome” Monster to face, yet its remains fetched enormous price thanks to all of

its tentacles having small Mana Stones embedded inside.

Some even said that Japan's economic woes of the time were solved in one go with the capital earned from subjugating one Arteramus...

"So the composition of the team should be... At minimum, High Tiers and above?" (Yi Hye-Rin)

Yi Hye-Rin spoke with a somewhat tense face. If she participated in this raiding party, it was quite obvious that the monetary rewards would be more than sufficient.

But the issue was with the inherent risk. No matter how much money she earned, she had to be alive first to enjoy it...

"Not too long ago, the Goblin Alchemist has decided to supply all the potions necessary for this raid in exchange for the small part of profits earned from the sale of the bird's remains. So you can rest your worries." (Kim Yu-Rin)

"Let me! I'll do it!!"

As soon as words left Kim Yu-Rin's mouth, Yi Hye-Rin quickly raised her hand up high. There was a bright smile on her lips.

She felt like an idiot, right then, because it was rather obvious that the Goblin Alchemist would definitely help out here, since they were members in the same Guild to begin with. Even though Kim Yu-Rin was only a non-regular member, but still.

To have such a reliable and capable support, now this was what she was talking about.

As Hye-Rin was being deeply impressed by The Monster Guild's personal connections, she was...

"You can't."

...She was being ruthlessly rejected.

"...Wah, why not?! I'm also a High Tier Knight, though?!" (Yi Hye-Rin)

"Your compatibility with that Monster is just too low. How will you defend against all those tentacles that shoot out tens of times in a single second with that sword of

yours?” (Kim Yu-Rin)

“I, I can definitely defend against them!! Instead...” (Yi Hye-Rin)

“Be quiet. We’ll talk about that a bit later... For now, the next portion of this briefing will be done by me.” (Kim Yu-Rin)

Kim Yu-Rin coldly cut Yi Hye-Rin’s words off and took over the proceedings.

While carrying documents, she stood before the podium and let out a fake cough. It was unknown what she wanted to say just yet, but one could see how nervous she was.

“The total number participating in the raiding *team* will be... ten. That is the initial estimation. The plan is, of course, to pick Knights with Tiers at High, and within them, prioritise selecting the candidates with over ‘B’ rank in terms of the general capability, including the combat proficiency.”

There weren’t too many Knights in South Korea that met the strict conditions Yu-Rin had put forward.

This was because, High Tier Knights with general capabilities rated at B were good enough to really consider advancing to the Highest Tier rank.

“And so, the ones selected for this subjugation raid, are... Song Min-Yu, from Team 2, Joo Hah-Yeoung from Team 3...”

Kim Yu-Rin read out the names of eight people and then...

“...And Yi Hye-Rin.” (Kim Yu-Rin)

“Whew...”

Yi Hye-Rin was the 9th to enter the list.

However, Yu-Rin didn’t name the last participant. Only just that, she was busy wetting her rapidly-drying lips, while they moved up and down slightly.

“...And who is the last one?”

Yi Hye-Rin wondered out aloud. Kim Yu-Rin then took a deep breath and then, spoke.

“For the last position, I’d like to invite the Hero Orc.”

She spat out these words.

For a few seconds after those words left her mouth, no one spoke up. At first, no one could quite understand what she was saying, and then, thought that she was cracking a high-level joke instead.

“...I believe that the Hero Orc’s martial prowess approaches that of a Highest Tier Knight already. And its compatibility also fits, so if the Orc participates, it’ll benefit us greatly. Not to forget, Orcs are creatures that enjoy battling strong foes. Definitely...”
(Kim Yu-Rin)

“Nonono, wait a minute here! Are you, really, really serious about this?” (Yi Hye-Rin)

Unfortunately for the listeners, Kim Yu-Rin’s attitude was quite serious, so Yi Hye-Rin had no choice but to step in.

“...I’ve taken over the management of the Hero Orcs of late. Enough people saw me enter that village. Also, the whole country knows that the Hero Orcs are not a threat and the current situation is, people wish to call them ‘Korean Orcs’ instead...”

“No, wait right there, but that’s not the problem here?!”

Hye-Rin shook her head hard while showing how shocked she was.

“But it’s completely nonsensical. You’re telling us to raid a Monster with Orcs, which are also Monsters?” (Yi Hye-Rin)

“...What’s wrong with that?”

Too bad, Kim Yu-Rin was completely, totally serious about this. Towards her, every Knight gathered here in the conference room sent in stares of utter shock.

“Also, the weapons wielded by the Orcs are special, so...”

However, Yu-Rin showed not one bit of concern and carried on with the briefing.

No, it was far more correct to call this a ‘presentation’ instead, to make these people accept the idea of the Hero Orc.

CHAPTER 95

CHANGES IN THE DAILY LIFE, PART 2 (2)

“...You, what?”

It was an afternoon.

Just like any other day, Sae-Jin in the Hero Orc Form welcomed Kim Yu-Rin, only to be met with quite an unexpected proposal.

“An aid?”

The changes in the Orc’s facial expression was probably the most honest he had shown in ages. And that displayed how absurd her proposal was.

“...Yes. It is a very powerful Monster. If Mister Orc can fight with us, then there’s a chance that the number of victims might decrease...”

Kim Yu-Rin was seriously trying to convince one Monster to help her slay another Monster.

The Orc carefully studied her appearance while feeling his mouth become numb. But he couldn’t spot a single sign that she was joking at all.

“Also, you are the perfect natural enemy of this Monster bird. With that powerful shock wave you create...”

“You, want me to fight alongside humans?”

Even the ‘human’ Kim Sae-Jin found this notion ridiculous.

Of course, if he did choose to step up, then he’d become a powerful ally. But a cooperative hunting – a raid – needed a perfect teamwork as the lives of each and every participants were on the line. But she wanted a Monster to butt in there? Not just the Knights but even the regular civilians would intervene and say no.

Was she under the delusion of thinking that he was a ‘human’ since he could speak?

Or was she still just too naïve? The Orc gazed down at her with slightly criticising eyes.

“I am well aware of Mister Orc’s worries. However...”

“Forget it. You want to talk nonsense, then go away.”

Even before Kim Yu-Rin could finish, the Orc coldly cut her off.

“Eh? Huh?”

Originally, Orcs loved to fight, plus the Hero Orc helped humans out before not to mention that he was on friendly terms with her. That was why she came here to speak to him but now, she was getting flustered by his cold refusal.

“I play with you a few times, and now you’ve gone mad. I said, go away, now.”

She tried to say something in reply, but the Orc just shook his head to show there was nothing more left to say and vacated his seat. All she could do was to blankly stare at his back.

Seeing such a cold and decisive attitude, she almost thought that she saw a hologram containing the words ‘favourable impression with the target has fallen’ rising before her eyes, just like how someone with a particular Trait had described it to her.



The world’s attention was naturally drawn towards the Boss level Monster that had appeared in South Korea in ages. The date the Raven Knights Order set for the subjugation was 25th of July, which meant there were still some time left until then. So, many TV stations busily moved around, getting ready for this massive, massive event.

First thing they did was to interview the ten participants of the raiding team – starting off with Yi Hye-Rin, then Song Min-Yu, Joo Hah-Yeoung, Kim Yu-Rin as well as other High Tier and Highest Tier Knights, and even...

“Yes. It’s true that our Guild has decided to supply the potions.” (Sae-Jin)

...Even including Kim Sae-Jin.

Although his expression clearly displayed his confusion at why he was being interviewed, as he and the PD conducting this interview had a good history that went back a long way, Sae-Jin didn't say much and agreed to do it.

"But we heard that it's more than just potions, however? Aren't you letting Miss Yi Hye-Rin borrow *something* quite special as well?" (Interviewer)

"Oh, that. Yes, as a fellow Guild member has requested for it, I'm lending a Griffin out to her." (Sae-Jin)

Three days ago, the Raven Knights Order asked to borrow a Griffin for the Boss raid. At first, Sae-Jin was curious as to why they needed one, but after receiving a call from Yi Hye-Rin, he understood their reason.

She loved being around and taking care of Griffins so much so that whenever she didn't have anything lined up in her schedule, she kept riding on Griffins until to the point of taking away the title of the "Griffin Rider" off Joo Ji-Hyuk. So, she and a Griffin together definitely presented a great tactical advantage in this raid.

As an aside, the Griffin in this case was not Muffin, but Muffin's male offspring.

Around six months ago, Muffin got married (?) to a Griffin that was a little bit – in other words, by a lot – younger than her and the number of cubs she produced was now sitting at 13 so far.

Well, the husband (?) in this case was drying up like a mummified husk thanks to Muffin's voracious sexual appetite, but whatever.

Kim Sae-Jin selected the male Griffin out of the 13 'kids' that was the closest to Yi Hye-Rin for this Boss raid.

"That is so amazing. By the way, there seems to be a strange atmosphere brewing between the Raven and the Dawn currently. What are your thoughts regarding this development?" (Interviewer)

"...A strange atmosphere?" (Sae-Jin)

"Yes, sir. Isn't it true that you, the Guild Master, are quite close to the Dawn? Well, there are suspicions that you're switching your allegiances to the Raven, after showing a great deal of support in this group hunt, the so-called Boss raid."

The PD was mindful of the Guild's influence so he chose his words carefully.

In all honesty, the PD asking such questions was the sign of how powerful 'The Monster' had grown. Now normally, it would be the Societies that would be mindful of the Knights Orders and Wizard Towers, but with The Monster, it was the other way around – both the Orders and Towers were trying to make sure to get on the Guild's good side instead.

"Well, that... Wouldn't it be great if they combine their strength together? I quite like both Orders, you see." (Sae-Jin)

Since he was somewhat aware of this fact already, Sae-Jin decided to answer as vaguely as possible.

"In that case..."

"Should we end the interview here? I have prior engagements, you see."

Sae-Jin cut the next question from the PD right there.

Today was the 14th of July, the date of a very important promise he needed to keep.

"Oh, yes. Thank you for agreeing to do this interview."

Although there were still countless questions they wanted to ask, the filming crew and the PD quickly got ready to leave and requested for a hand shake from Sae-Jin. Their attitudes had changed quite a bit compared to before, which only made Sae-Jin feel more satisfied as he began shaking hands.



And now, it was the day of the fierce battle – the Boss raid; a one-time event that had gripped the world's attention, enough to even surpass over 30% in the overall viewing figure.

The ten Knights and four Wizards hired for this raid entered a limo while receiving words of encouragements and well wishes from the waiting crowd, and hurriedly made their way towards the Boss Monster's nesting ground.

After arriving at the entrance to the city of Youngju, they exited the vehicle and made

the rest of the way on foot, carefully threading through the devastated cityscape.

“There it is!!”

Yi Hye-Rin shouted out aloud.

Only after slaughtering masses of Monsters and walking for a long while, they could finally locate the sight of the black rooster at a far off distance.

“...Hey, isn’t that much bigger than we thought?” (Unnamed Knight)

However, they felt something was wrong as they stared at it. The Monster seemed far bigger, compared to when they were discussing about it in the mission briefing...

“Looks like it has grown. And also, Hye-Rin, do remember that you’re in a battlefield.”
(Song Min-Yu)

“...But I’m doing the best that I can?” (Yi Hye-Rin)

“Yes, the best that you can play with a Griffin.” (Song Min-Yu)

“Stop it, both of you. First of all, Wizards. Both of the Boss Monster’s maximum attack range and aggro distance is suspected to be quite considerable.” (Kim Yu-Rin)

Kim Yu-Rin quickly subdued the two bickering high-ranked Knights, Song Min-Yu and Yi Hye-Rin, and started the new mission briefing.

“So please, get to as far a safe distance as possible, hide yourselves well and then use your magic spells.” (Kim Yu-Rin)

The Wizards nodded their heads.

“And to the Knights present, we will fight exactly according to how we practiced for this battle.”

““““Yes, ma’am.””””

All the Knights replied back with gusto, with the exception of one Yi Hye-Rin who was still too absorbed in brushing the fur of her Griffin.

“Yi Hye-Rin?”

“Ah, yes! Yes?!”

“...Can you do this? Your target is its eyes.”

The reason for escorting (?) a Griffin while sacrificing a part of the reward payment was to attack the Monster bird's weak point. Since the creature was as tall as two Ogres stacked together, it would be incredibly difficult to hit the weak points located on the creature's head with their sword auras or magic attacks, after all.

“But of course~. Leave it to me.”

Yi Hye-Rin vigorously replied, and as if to agree with her, the Griffin next to her powerfully flapped its wings once.

“...Well, then. Everyone, please drink your potions now.”

Kim Yu-Rin pulled out the potion ‘A Goblin's Courage’ while telling the others to do the same.

This scarlet-coloured liquid was rated first among the body fortification potions on sale. It was also seen as the next best item made by the Goblin Alchemist after his famed healing potions. It was in such a demand that it was difficult to buy one as it was so rarely circulated on the market.

“Don't hesitate because it's rare, just drink it all. Well, any remaining potions will be confiscated.” (Kim Yu-Rin)

At her declaration, one or two ended up drinking the whole vial of the potions all the while still feeling great regret at the same time. The obvious exception was, of course, Yi Hye-Rin, who was sharing her potion with the Griffin.

“Let's go.”

The effects of the potion was as advertised. All the Knights who had drunk the potion could feel their vitality increasing exponentially.

“Okay!!”

“Let’s move!”

“I’m going up ahead!” (Yi Hye-Rin)

– *Kkiiieeck!!*

As they had practiced before, the Griffin took Yi Hye-Rin on its back and flew into the sky while roaring out loudly. And when the Monster bird’s focus was drawn towards this sudden intrusion, the Knights on the ground quickly made their way towards their target.

Sensing something was amiss, the Monster bird extended out its tentacles from its body, but the combination of Yi Hye-Rin and the Griffin easily avoided those while she wielded her sharp sword.

There was no real need to get too close, since there was the attribute ‘Bending’ imbued within her sword, which allowed her to freely manipulate the attacking distance at will.

SFX for a blade slashing through air

The sword light from Yi Hye-Rin’s attack drew a blue-coloured trajectory as it snaked its way towards the Monster’s eyes. And soon afterwards, the pained roar reverberated throughout the land.

“Yeehaw~!!”

30 seconds after the battle had begun. After achieving her goal, Yi Hye-Rin let out a loud shout. And the Knights rushed forward towards the Monster bird while the assured smile of victory formed on their faces.



Someone once said that one should wait until the end before celebrating.

Although the raid team successfully robbed the Monster of its eyesight less than one minute into the battle, the situation afterwards then steadily became worse and worse for them.

The issue was the Monster’s massive size. They already knew that the number of

tentacles would be high because of its huge body, but still, they weren't prepared just how ridiculously high it would be in reality.

No, this wasn't simply the problem of the high number of tentacles. The information clearly stated that the Japanese Boss raid only required three Highest Tier Knights back then. However, this team contained four Highest Tiers, six High Tier Knights, as well as four Wizards ranked B, yet...

"Kkeuhk!!"

Unfortunately, in this kind of situation, holding doubts of the Monster's true strength was a luxury none of the Knights could afford.

The tentacles rushed in like a hailstorm, not even giving them time to take a breather. It was a mistake to believe that its eyes were the weak point, as the Monster bird accurately intercepted the Knights even after losing its eyesight.

'How can this be...?' (Kim Yu-Rin)

The total number of tentacles sliced off already exceeded ten thousand. However, no matter how many they cut, the number didn't seem to decrease at all.

There was no opening in the tentacles pouring down like raindrops from the sky, and conversely, there was no chance for a counterattack as well. On top of this, these damn things steadily ate away their Mana barriers surrounding the Knights' bodies, which even made a rash charge forward an impossibility, too.

'No one said these things can eat away our Mana barriers!!'

Kim Yu-Rin gritted her teeth as she cut down yet more tentacles.

She had initially underestimated this Monster – since the tentacles were the part of the creature, with the activation of her Trait, she believed it would not take very long to bring this damn bird down at all.

But thinking like that was clearly a mistake.

Those tentacles were not the part of the Monster bird but a separate entity altogether. The proof was the fact that the huge Monster still remained standing even after she imbued the *purpose* of "faint even for a little bit of time" in her sword before attacking

it.

It was most likely that these tentacles were either parasites or symbiotes that lived off the main body.

“...Damn it!!”

Her roughly-swung sword strike drew a crescent shaped arc and sliced through countless tentacles, yet more replaced them.

“Everyone, retreat!!”

Kim Yu-Rin shouted out. Her voice managed to travel to the others through the gaps of the attacking tentacles, but too bad, none of them possessed any leeway to make their getaway. It simply took their all just to defend themselves from all these tentacles, after all.

And so, it proved that even Yu-Rin herself couldn't make any follow-up orders in the end as well.

SFX for the crow of a rooster

That was because her consciousness shook into disarray for a short moment as soon as the loud crow shattered the surroundings.

“...Kkheuck!”

Seizing this opening, a tentacle bit into her body. But Yu-Rin simply wrapped the bleeding shoulder with Mana and continued to wield her sword.

She hadn't given up, but still, the situation was easy to figure out.

The flow of the battle was disadvantageous, and they couldn't even safely retreat anymore – the worst of all worst situations.

As the despair crept into the minds of all the Knights present here and their defeat becoming ever so a certainty...

“——!!”

From somewhere, a loud and powerful roar assaulted them. A familiar roar, it sure sounded like the call of salvation to Kim Yu-Rin's ears.

Kkwaaahang!!

Along with the roar, a massive shock wave traveled from the direction of North East and smashed apart all the tentacles while continuously expanding towards the Monster bird's main body.

– Kkieeck!!

It struck the creature. The Monster bird issued a short cry and retracted all of its tentacles, and that in turn gave all the Knights here valuable time.

“...Haah.”

The Knights quickly turned to look towards the direction of the mountainside where the shock wave had come from, while trying to rein in their rough breaths. At that moment, no one had a clue what to say.

Not one, not two, but dozens and dozens of Orcs were busy rushing over here while raising a cloud of dust.

“Ah...”

And Yu-Rin inadvertently let out a gasp after seeing the sight of the Hero Orc among the rushing Orcs, overflowing with a remarkably heroic aura.

It was such a cool appearance.

CHAPTER 96

CHANGES IN THE DAILY LIFE, PART 2 (3)

The flow of the battle reversed in a heartbeat as soon as the band of Orcs jumped into the fray.

Kwaaahang!!

The shock wave spreading out in the air easily blew away thousands of tentacles blanketing the sky like a dissipating fog.

And that lull in the constant attacks of tentacles naturally gave the Knights much needed breathing room; now that their own pace had been regained, they were in the position to go on the offensive.

SFX for tentacles rushing forward

However, the number of tentacles shooting out from the Monster bird seemed to know no end.

Still, the assault from these elite Orcs were no laughing matter, either.

Whenever they swung their destructive maces, tens of hundreds of tentacles turned to dust. These Orcs didn't rely or care for style or technique, just focusing on brutal strength only.

—-!!

The Orc that was the most heroic and magnificent roared out aloud and kicked the ground hard, jumping into the air.

His leg strength allowed him to jump up several tens of metres with absolute ease, and he went straight towards the Monster's cockscomb...

SFX for tentacles shooting something out

Instinctively sensing the approaching danger, the tentacles mounted on the Monster

bird's body began spewing poison towards the Orc while making a strange noise. But the Orc didn't give a damn and simply activated the Leviathan's scales to the absolute maximum.

Although the Monster fired off the poison confidently, it had no effect on the scales, other than washing off the dirt and making them look more shiny than before.

'It's not enough.'

But, unless Sae-Jin was in the Lycanthrope Form, it seemed that this was the limit of what the Orc's leg strength could do; he was actually aiming for the creature's weakness, its comb, but he could only reach the edges of its wattle on the neck.

Since there was little he could now, he used the Skill 'Fierce Strike' on the wattle, instead.

Tthaaahang!!

The clear and vivid roar resounded at the same time as the attack connected. The Monster bird writhed in pain after its vocal cord was attacked, but it couldn't cry out that destructive crow anymore. Now the things had come to this, the plan B was proving to be better than he initially thought.

SFX for tentacles attacking

However, the tentacles were not suffering from the same pain as the Monster bird itself, as they were separate entities to begin with. Since its host's life was in danger, all the tentacles seemed to lose any reasoning whatsoever and focused solely on one target, rushing towards the Orc that had attacked the Monster bird.

And well, that was the biggest mistake this Monster could ever make in its life.

"Everyone!!"

Pressed for time, Kim Yu-Rin shouted out one word as she dashed towards the Monster bird. Other Knights shared the same thought as her and every one of the 10 Knights present jumped towards the Monster.

But in all honesty, there was no need for all ten of them. It was enough with Kim Yu-Rin there. She squeezed out every ounce of Mana from her body and activated the Trait

‘Desideratum’, imbuing the sword with the strongest purpose she could load the weapon with – “faint, never to wake up”.

“...”

The moment Yu-Rin’s sword struck the Monster, its body began to falter to the side slowly.

“Heu-euck...”

Even Yu-Rin herself faltered and squatted down as well. As she didn’t have enough Mana, her Trait would remain activated for ten seconds at most, but that ten was more than enough.

After all, it didn’t matter if those tentacles still thrashed about, as the Monster bird lying on its side unmoving was no better than a chicken waiting to be slaughtered in the end.

On top of this massive fallen chicken, the group of Orcs and Knights descended.

And so, that was how Kim Sae-Jin was able to read yet another feel-good alert window.

The actual reason why he brought along these elite Orcs to this place was quite simple. He thought that, judging from the clues he had seen until now, he might evolve into the Orc Chieftain if he led other Orcs in a group hunt.

And his expectation was right on the money.

[Condition complete: the group hunt. (3/3)] [The Monster Form ‘Orc Great Warrior’ will evolve into ‘Orc Chieftain’.] [All Stats will rise drastically, and the body hair will grow accordingly.]

‘...Hair?!’

What hair? Does my hair represent the Skill Level or something?

Initially, he felt somewhat disappointed by this. But well, when he checked his Status Window, his jaw hit the floor. With the exception of Mana Affinity and Magic Strength, every other Stat saw an explosive increase of over 100 points each.

Plus, the amount of time he could suppress the instincts of the Lycanthrope, the time he could spend as the human Kim Sae-Jin, had increased to over 18.5 hours... So, yes, in that moment, he couldn't be more happier even if he tried.



The end of the battle finally came with the Orc Chieftain ripping off the Monster bird's cockscomb; the only thing that filled this vast open space was deathly quiet stillness. Ten Knights tried to control their heavy breathing, all the while staring at the group of Orcs.

“ ... ”

As expected, the first one to move among them was Kim Yu-Rin. She carefully moved her feet towards the Orc Chieftain.

As the desolate wind blew across the land and tickled past the ankles, Yu-Rin carefully gathered both her arms in front of her chest while looking up at the Orc. That faint smile on her lips seemed to represent her current state of emotions.

“...You did come. But you said you wouldn't.”

She shyly opened her mouth. The Orc slightly turned his head to look down on her.

The thing was, her face was caked with sweat as well as with dried and unidentifiable black blood – which pretty much made her look not so good at the moment. On top of this, his sensitive nose was picking up some atrocious odour drifting out of her that reminded him of clogged up sewers.

“...Ah, I'm...”

However, while totally unaware of her current appearance, she became more and more abashed at the Orc's pointed stares, and began twisting her body this way and that.

“ ... ”

The Orc let out a hollow chuckle and turned around to leave. Since he became the Chieftain, he got what he came here for. No need to endure the smell of sewers if he could help it.

“Wait, Mister Orc!!”

Kim Yu-Rin was about to chase after the back of the cold and indifferent Orc, but then, someone appeared out of nowhere and grasped her arm, stopping her.

It was Yi Hye-Rin this time as well. Yu-Rin’s face hardened as she yanked her arm loose.

But Yi Hye-Rin played this smartly, and instead of saying anything, she simply showed the reflection of Yu-Rin’s face on the polished surface of the sword. And the face that stared back was... really something else.

“...Ah.”

Yu-Rin’s jaws went slack after receiving a powerful mental shock, seeing that pathetic appearance. Even her consciousness wanted to blank out as well.



The information embargo on the Boss raid was lifted the moment the Monster was defeated and all the participants returned relatively unhurt. The news media that watched the battle from a great distance all hurriedly began doing their thing.

Disregarding all else, the news of the Hero Orcs entering the raid spread around and began snowballing into something bigger. The public didn’t pay much attention towards the unexpectedly-high strength of the Monster bird, and rather, the event of the Orcs helping out in the raid stole all the headlines away instead.

Among the razor-sharp focused attention, Kim Yu-Rin’s opinion that the Knights could perform the raid together with the Orcs got reevaluated favourably, but during the post-raid press conference, the person herself seemed rather downtrodden for some reason.

[I was tasked with watching over the village of the Hero Orc, and during my time there, I became friendly with the Hero Orc Chieftain. When we were planning out this raid, I immediately thought of conducting it with the Hero Orc, but he ended up refusing the request. However... on the day of the raid, he came to lend us an aid...]

Thanks to Yu-Rin's press conference, the Orc was able to get an unexpected and explosive reaction from the female half of the populace. They were saying something about him being the "bad boy" type that women fell for.

On the other side of the spectrum, many academics became incredibly excited, saying that this event would go down in the annals of the world's history as the beginning of a new era and many of them even began writing dissertations on it as well.

However, the man responsible for causing all this havoc, Kim Sae-Jin, had to go to a rather weird place on the first day of August.

"How many?" (Unnamed Knight 1)

There was a tower in the Gangwon Province that rose up very high into the sky. A tower that was absolutely overwhelming in its presence among the forest of skyscrapers, and at the same time, utterly different from them in concept.

This tower was often referred to as the holy land of all the Knights out there, and had the name Eden attached to it.

"The number that passed the final preliminary elimination is 205. It's quite a lot."
(Unnamed Knight 2)

"It's no longer the level of 'quite', though?" (Unnamed Knight 1)

Eden annually ran an evaluation test to officially appoint Knights and assign ranks to them. And today was the day when the Lowest Tier Knights – the ones that would be assigned to the Orders all over the country – would be selected.

Normally, the participants of this test were cadets from the Knight Academy as well as those who had awakened their Traits.

Cadets without Traits were still allowed to participate if they presented their grades from the Academy. As for those who awakened their Trait recently, one only had to prove that he or she possessed a 'useful' Trait to enter.

"The ratio is?" (Unnamed Knight 1)

"Almost all of them – no, with the exception of one, everyone else is either a cadet taking the test for the first time, or one who is repeating it. Ten of the newbie cadets

possess Traits, sir.” (Unnamed Knight 2)

“Anyone interesting we should look out for?” (Unnamed Knight 1)

“Yes. There are three.” (Unnamed Knight 2)

The subordinate Knight handed over a chart to his superior officer.

“First one is Yi Yu-Jin. A female, scored very highly in the proficiency of wielding Mana. Judging by how well she can control her sword aura already, I assume she might be referred to as the new Kim Yu-Rin or even Yu Sae-Jung in the near future.” (Unnamed Knight 2)

“...Is it a trend nowadays that talented female Knights must look like a supermodel?” (Unnamed Knight 1)

“Haha... Well, there’s nothing we can do about that, sir. When a woman wields Mana, that process alone always smoothes out the skin tone and subtly reshapes facial structure to the so-called ideal form, after all.”

A thin, bitter smile spread on the superior officer’s lips. He was feeling rather disappointed at this idiot subordinate of his for still believing in that superstitious nonsense...

“Next?” (Unnamed Knight 1)

“His name is Kim Myung-Hahn, sir. A male, possessing a unique Trait. It’s been named ‘Asura’, and it lets him control surrounding Mana as his own.” (Unnamed Knight 2)

“Hooh.”

“And finally... He’s the only one who is not a cadet, sir. And he’s a homeless as well. Apparently, his Trait awakened a while ago when he was about to die from the cold and so he applied for a spot today.”

The superior officer frowned deeply. Such an occurrence happened every now and then, but whenever he heard of it, it pissed him off, somewhat. To think, these no good wastrels were trying to become Knights relying only on their Traits and not through hard work...

“And what’s his name?”

“It’s Jin Seh-Hahn.”

“...Remember it well, and if he acts like he’s about to do something funny, kick him out.”

Jin Seh-Hahn.

Actually, that was the fake identity Kim Sae-Jin was using.

It was easy to forge a fake identity with the help of the intelligence operatives he had fostered until now, but Sae-Jin’s was even more water-tight thanks to Yu Baek-Song’s intervention as well.

The biggest issue with his outer appearance was also taken care of, with something called ‘Partial Beastification’.

Obviously, there was nothing he could do about his overall facial structure, but his eyelines, the nose and the jawline were all changed slightly to resemble a wolf more closely; and by extending his beard and goatee to a ridiculous degree, he certainly looked like a totally different person altogether.

As for his powerful scent – well, he acquired an artifact that emitted a very unpleasant odour in order to suppress his own.

And the reason why he had to infiltrate Eden’s Knight evaluation test while going so far as to change his appearance, was...

One had to look back to a date four weeks ago: 14th of July.

On a perfectly average Summer afternoon, when Kim Sae-Jin held a meeting with Yu Baek-Song within the Guild’s office.



Now that she had relinquished the position of the Chief of the SID, Yu Baek-Song’s face seemed somewhat conflicted, one part sad, one part glad.

“And when is the date for the inauguration ceremony for the vacant ministerial

position?” (Sae-Jin)

“How should I know? It’ll be announced when it’s ready, I guess.” (Yu Baek-Song)

Kim Hahn-Seol was being prosecuted for taking bribes as well as for collusion among many others. Even then, he was still trying to contact Sae-Jin, desperately searching for a way out, but Sae-Jin remained ruthless.

“If you climb up to that position, you can finally find the information we talked about, yes?” (Sae-Jin)

“...Well, the thing is... I already had it checked out.” (Yu Baek-Song)

At Yu Baek-Song’s words, Sae-Jin’s eyes went extra round.

“But, that...”

“However, it’s not what you’ve been expecting, not at all. That information is impossible even for me to access.” (Yu Baek-Song)

“...What do you mean?”

His momentary expectation morphed into cold disappointment real fast.

“The reason is, I still lack the qualifications. And so, all I could find out was just where the info might be buried in.” (Yu Baek-Song)

Yu Baek-Song then sighed out deeply.

“...And where could it be?” (Sae-Jin)

“The 2nd Tier Secret Records Archives, located in the upper mid floors of the tower of Eden. It seems that your father was a Knight directly working for Eden.”

“.....”

“I’m sure you know of this already; Eden is a world-wide organization and is therefore the same as any other independent nation. Obviously, it’s different from country to county, but no matter what, unless you’re a member of the Eden’s administration, it’s impossible to extract any information out from there.”

Kim Sae-Jin held his head with a pained expression. As the things he had done until now became a waste of time, the amount of disappointment and emptiness he felt couldn't even be imagined.

What came next after disappointment was anger. Besides the fact that his father was seemingly a Knight who worked for Eden, just what kind of truth precipitated a need to treat the information about him as a top secret and hide it away in a location on the tower's upper mid floors?

"...So, in order to extract the relevant information, we need someone to become the Knight of Eden."

"Theoretically, yep. But just who can become a Knight working for Eden at this stage? I mean, it's hard enough trying to become a Knight working for regular Orders, for crying out loud." (Yu Baek-Song)

If one wanted to become a Knight of Eden, then he or she had to forget about one's aspirations and enter the organization voluntarily.

Meaning, after passing the test, one had to give up the chance of going to other Knights Orders and must choose to enter Eden instead.

On top of this, considering the fact that the entrance was open to not just the local candidates but to the rest of the world, the entry barrier was actually a lot tougher than simply being a Lowest Tier Knight. Not to forget, one only got a single chance in life to voluntarily enter Eden, too.

And so, the number of successful applicants that entered Eden in the past three years from South Korea was... just one.

That showed just how much Eden valued the future growth potential and abilities of its candidates...

"..."

"..."

In that moment, Kim Sae-Jin stared at Yu Baek-Song. She too stared right back at him.

Silently, a strange but knowing gaze was exchanged between the two of them.

However, Kim Sae-Jin already had a past record of being a Hunter, and also he was just too famous, so it was not possible for him to become a Knight affiliated with Eden, the group that emphasized on its members' 'dedication' above all else.

"...You said you can make any artifacts, right?"

Yu Baek-Song spoke first. Although rare, artifacts that could alter a person's appearance still existed.

"Yes, I did."

Even though he said as much, the truth was, Sae-Jin didn't really need an artifact.

"I heard that Knights of Eden can freely commute as they please?" (Sae-Jin)

"Yeah, that's right. Those people in Eden receive commission from other Knights Orders and the national government, you see. So they do have a lot of free time."

Kim Sae-Jin began smiling in an evil manner.

Wasn't this just a perfect condition for him?

"But can you fight, like, really well?"

"It's one of my Traits, so yes."

Of course, he hadn't yet faced off against a Knight who used Mana at full power during sparring, but even when simply comparing on his physique as a 'human', he was on par with a talented Mid Tier Knight.

"It'll take some time, so will you be okay with that?" (Yu Baek-Song)

"...Why would it take time? Knights only value abilities, after all."

As long as he was careful about the potential camp training, he'd be fine.



And that's how Kim Sae-Jin was able to participate in Eden's Knights evaluation test as Jin Seh-Hahn.

“Welcome, everyone.”

Whenever there was an evaluation, Eden would often invite famous Knights to serve as temporary instructors. And the person invited this time was someone rather familiar even to Sae-Jin.

It was Joo Ji-Hyuk.

He was putting on as much airs as possible and tried to appear commanding to the crowd.

“You’ll be participating in various tests once every day for the duration of one week. You can choose to stay in the dormitory located in Eden Tower’s 1st floor, or alternatively, choose to commute from home...”

‘...Haaahhh’

While hearing this, Sae-Jin inwardly sighed out. He wasn’t even shooting an episode of ‘Undercover Boss’ or something like that, and yet, here he was...

“For now, you will take a seat and be on standby. Carry on.”

As Sae-Jin was going through the emotions of shame, he missed the end of Joo Ji-Hyuk’s announcements and ended up falling into a bit of panic.

“...What the hell.”

The applicants who were already familiar with one another began to form groups of same classes, those who were repeating the test, or those who came from the same neighbourhood, etc, etc...

There was seemingly no opening whatsoever to penetrate such tight cliques, and soon, all 204 applicants began sending chilly gazes of contempt towards Sae-Jin’s direction, after the rumours of him passing the initial evaluation without a hassle thanks to his great Trait had permeated to everywhere already.

And so, he had become a sore thumb sticking out in less than three seconds.

“...Is he the one?”

“Dunno what Trait he has, but it must’ve been pretty nice, huh?”

“I heard it from my mom that he’s a bum. A homeless bum!! Look at his beard – it’s so mangy and stuff!!”

While eavesdropping on the conversations going on around him via his sensitive hearing, Sae-Jin couldn’t help but sigh out inwardly again. Didn’t matter whether they were Knights or not, the fact remained that they were still a bunch of kids.

“But, hmm. Don’t you think he might look good if he got rid of that beard?”

“...So what. The fact is, he is still someone who didn’t put in any effort unlike us, just leeching off on that lottery win of his.”

He then caught onto someone praising him like a ghost, and his head snapped towards the direction almost like a reflex.

He saw a pair of boy and girl. He might as well call them a handsome couple or some such. There were only two of them and not one more, and there was no one else around them, either.

“...Huh? Isn’t he looking over here? Do you think he might come over?”

The boy spoke with an interested voice.

“If he comes, then tell him to scram.”

But the girl’s was rather sardonic, instead.

‘I’m not going there even if you beg me.’

After slyly appraising them over, Sae-Jin shook his head and plopped down on where he stood, before he began stroking the lengthy beard that grew along his jawline. There was something quite addictive about it as he played around with it.

CHAPTER 97

EDEN, THE TOWER OF KNIGHTS (1)

Although there were countless cadets who chose to take the evaluation exam immediately after graduating from the Academy, the number of them passing it the first time and then becoming a Knight were quite low.

That was because most of these new graduates simply lacked in ability compared to the so-called repeat test takers, who were sometimes referred to as 'Nth takers', and were eliminated during the preliminaries.

So, after graduating from their respective schools and the Academy, quite a few cadets received further private education or trained alone by themselves while continuously applying for the exam for the period between one to four years. Beyond that point, it was tacitly understood the applicant was unable to pass and had to give up there.

And those who were able to attain some form of enlightenment – or even “awaken” a Trait, although possibility of this was extremely low – would pass the exam with a good grade and enter famous a Knights Order such as the Dawn, Raven or Goryeo, etc, etc. But if not, then they would have to give up on being a Knight, or be satisfied with a life as a Low Tier ~ low Mid Tier Knight in a small Order based in some rural backwater towns.

With this backstory in mind, the groups present here at the examination grounds were separated accordingly to the age of the participants.

As the policy dictated, one-third of the test takers were fresh cadets straight out of the Academy's graduation ceremony, but the rest were the repeat test takers who could understand one another's hardship and loneliness.

But for Kim Sae-Jin, who was an existence that didn't fit into either category, all he could do was to sit alone and eavesdrop on other people's conversations.

Initially, cadets busily berated and mocked Jin Seh-Hahn/Kim Sae-Jin as a person who didn't even go to the Academy but relied solely on his Trait to pass the preliminary, but soon enough, stopped caring about him and became lost within their own conversations.

“Everyone, atten-hut!!”

As Seh-Hahn (Sae-Jin) was about to get bored of listening in on these kids, Joo Ji-Hyuk appeared with a good timing and announced the beginning of the examination proper. All the participants got up and paid him close attention.

“Follow in the groups of 50 as assigned before. We will be heading to the 3rd floor for your first test.”

Speaking up to here, Joo Ji-Hyuk led the groups forward, while three instructors who had seemingly appeared out of nowhere began silently following them.



The first day's evaluation was ‘measurement’.

The purpose of this was to measure the current abilities of those who had passed the preliminary and to establish a ranking of the participants, which would prove important moving forward. It would serve as a basis to decide which cadet should go through and who would be disqualified.

Although having a high talent didn't mean one would be great at the actual combat situations, still, all the cadets' attitude towards this measurement was very serious, as it was definitely better to start off somewhere near the ‘top’ rather than at the ‘bottom’.

“Today will be different from the preliminaries when your physical capabilities, talents with Mana, etc, etc, were measured. Today, your actual combat ability will be put to the test.” (Joo Ji-Hyuk)

Hearing Joo Ji-Hyuk speak, Sae-Jin fell into a slight dilemma. Since he was in the ‘Human’ form, he was much weaker compared to the ‘Lycanthrope’ appearance, but still, his raw physical strength would easily match a upper Mid Tier Knight.

It was this massive power level that was the cause for his dilemma.

Even though he was trying to become a Knight of Eden... What Eden looked for from a cadet wasn't the current set of abilities, but the potential for growth and talent. However, wasn't being a upper Mid Tier from the get-go a bit too much? Sure, their evaluation criteria for the ability of an applicant was higher than most other Knights Orders, but still.

“And that is the Monster you’ll be facing off today.” (Joo Ji-Hyuk)

While he was thinking, the exam got under way. A Wizard on the 3rd floor balcony, tasked with lending an assistance to the exam procedure, summoned a Monster.

SFX for a dog’s bark

A Monster that sat on the boundary of between a “normal” difficulty and “slightly hard” within the Low Tier, a Heavy Gnoll was summoned to the testing arena.

Cadets all tensed up, but for Sae-Jin, all enthusiasm left him, instead.

A hollow chuckle even broke out of his lips, after he realised once more the fact that he was in the middle of a children’s playground.

“Who’d like to go first?”

Joo Ji-Hyuk scanned the cadets, smiling. And there was this one girl who energetically reacted to his calling.

“Lemme do it!!”

Hair vividly dyed in vibrant orange brown; razor-sharp eyelines and a nose that could slice a person. A hardened expression as if unsatisfied by something – but she’s was a girl whose beauty could make those features as a charming “plus”, instead.

“Name?” (Joo Ji-Hyuk)

“It’s Cadet Yi Yu-Jin.”

“Oh-ho.” (Joo Ji-Hyuk)

Sae-Jin could see that this girl must have been quite a famous future prospect, judging by the way Joo Ji-Hyuk was reacting towards her.

“Alright. Then go ahead.” (Joo Ji-Hyuk)

While her long hair danced with each step taken, Yi Yu-Jin enthusiastically walked towards the prepared stage.

“No need to wait for the signal. Just start whenever you’re ready.” (Joo Ji-Hyuk)

She stood before the growling Gnoll and carefully surveyed her surroundings and the Monster itself.

And after maybe three minutes had passed, she finally unsheathed her sword. Funnily enough, though, her well-crafted weapon was an item Sae-Jin was rather intimately familiar with.

‘...Isn’t that one of the training swords I made?’

The sword Sae-Jin made in order to use during training; out of ten Knights he had asked to come and spar with him, eight showed much interest in the weapon, so he told them to take it home... There was this rumour he heard that the swords were being sold in the second hand markets. Must’ve been a true story.

“Heup!!”

Right away, Yi Yu-Jin let out a short shout and rushed towards the Gnoll.

“Ho?” (Sae-Jin)

Her swordsmanship was extraordinary enough to even make Sae-Jin let out a light gasp of exclamation.

Her sword seemed to aim at the Gnoll’s neck but then, took a sudden turn and swung towards the Monster’s chest. Her style of wielding the sword, where she would sometimes switch the grip on the weapon and aim for the Gnoll’s ankle, was completely unconventional, to say the least.

Indeed, it was as far from prescribed on the textbooks as one could imagine, but perhaps because of that, her swordsmanship style was lot more valuable than normal.

SFX for a strange death howl

A small sweat drop flowed down to Yi Yu-Jin’s chin and fell, and at the same time, Gnoll, with a hole in its chest, ceased breathing after letting out a weird cry.

“Good, very good.”

Joo Ji-Hyuk clapped his hands and spoke in admiration after getting charmed by her skills.

“That was commendable. Alright, then. From now on, no more volunteers and the person with the name I call out will go up to the arena.” (Joo Ji-Hyuk)

His admiration lasted only for a short while. Joo Ji-Hyuk resumed his duty as a proctor and began calling out different names.

And after around twenty people had their combat abilities measured...

“Next, Jin Seh-Hahn!”

Finally, Jin Seh-Hahn/Kim Sae-Jin’s turn had arrived. Maybe it was due to his already eye-catching outer appearance, all the gazes present focused on him the moment the name left Joo Ji-Hyuk’s mouth.

While tensing up slightly at the possibility of Joo Ji-Hyuk getting suspicious of him, Jin Seh-Hahn/Kim Sae-Jin walked up to the arena.

SFX for a dog’s growl

Right away, the Heavy Gnoll showed a particular reaction. All because his nice scent having been blended with that unpleasant odour.

SFX for a dog’s louder growl

The Monster stomped on the ground with both of its feet and showed signs of rushing forward. Meanwhile, Sae-Jin was leisurely deliberating on what to do next. How should he win this – act like he was fighting a desperate battle and then pull out the hidden trump card? Or, like Yi Yu-Jin before him, overwhelm the creature from the get-go?

SFX for a crazed, mad barking of a dog

Well, he couldn’t stay undecided for a long time anyway. The frenzied Gnoll had already rushed forward and was about to arrive in front of him.



With a pair of deeply interested eyes, Yi Yu-Jin gazed at the homeless bum that had walked up to the arena, Jin Seh-Hahn.

‘He’s got a good physique.’

Although the lengthy beard connected to his sideburns looked rather unfashionable, the muscles that could be spied from the gaps of his training suit looked better than excellent. Yi Yu-Jin didn’t want to admit this, but in all honesty, even Knights would struggle to obtain such a body.

A body that wasn’t heavy enough to restrict one’s movement, but also not light enough either – the perfectly balanced, so-called ‘Iron Body’.

‘Is his Trait related to his physique?’

Unless it was a Trait, it’d be quite difficult to explain how a homeless bum could possess such a body – plus, seeing that he was empty-handed as well, it just had to be a Trait at work here. That’s how Yi Yu-Jin had figured, but still, as a woman herself, she found it hard to tear her eyes away from that broad and sturdy back of Jin Seh-Hahn.

“Oi, what’s the matter with that Gnoll?” (Goh Yun-Jong)

As she was looking at the unfolding situation with interest while not caring much about the character of the person in question, her childhood friend Goh Yun-Jong suddenly began raising a fuss. That made Yi Yu-Jin to divert her attention as well.

And she saw the Gnoll angrily growling and threatening, its eyes bloodshot – which was quite unlike before, as if it also intensely disliked that homeless bum or something.

“This is getting interesting, right? I wonder how he will react?” (Goh Yun-Jong)

At Goh Yun-Jong’s words, Yi Yu-Jin shifted her focus back to Jin Seh-Hahn.

“He’s panicking.” (Yi Yu-Jin)

She could tell just by seeing the back of him hesitate ever so slightly.

“Look, you can see quite easily. He has no idea how to respond when the Monster is rushing at him. And you know why? Because Traits don’t teach you stuff like that.” (Yi Yu-Jin)

She clicked her tongue and commented on what was happening up on the arena.

“I’ve said this before. Relying on only your Traits will end up ruining you. That is why...”
(Yi Yu-Jin)

*“*SFX for a loud martial art shout*”*

Tuokwahang!!!

Almost at the same time, with a loud shout, a powerful explosion resounded in the arena.

And afterwards, a scene beyond the scope of her ability to understand unfolded right before her eyes.

Kwagagagang!!

It was nothing more than a single punch, yet the Gnoll’s body flew away like an emptiest of all empty cans in the history of mankind.

SFX for steam rising up

Before long, the Gnoll was embedded deeply on the wall opposite side, leaving behind only its outline, and from the path it flew, hot steam slowly rose up.

“ ... ”

“ ”

A single punch, one fist, caused this absolutely overwhelming scene. The only thing filling up the space was a deafening silence.

“...Keum. That’s a Trait, alright. Looks like a nice Trait, too.” (Yi Yu-Jin)

Even Yi Yu-Jin was dumbstruck by what happened, but recovered her wits quickly after sensing Goh Yun-Jong’s gaze on her. She nodded her head as if it was all within

her expectations.

“I thought you were lecturing us on about panic and whatnot just now?” (Goh Yun-Jong)

“...What are you on about? It’s true that he was panicking. It’s just that, his Trait is powerful enough to overcome it, that’s all.” (Yi Yu-Jin)

Too bad for her, a drop of cold sweat traveling down her forehead was incomparably more honest than her words.



And now, after the end of the combat prowess measurement, the time was the lunch break, to fill up the empty bellies and wait for the next part of the exam.

As expected, Jin Seh-Hahn was eating alone while sitting far away from the other cadets. But unlike before, he wasn’t saddened by this. When he thought about it, he had no reason to feel depressed because others avoided him. Better still, no minor annoyances would bother him like this. Definitely not a made-up justification, it was. Never.

“Mister Jin Seh-Hahn?”

Suddenly, he heard a smooth and beautiful voice coming from his back. Taken by surprise just a tad, he turned around to look, and found a pair of boy and girl staring at him.

They were... the ones he memorised as the ‘handsome couple’, and their names were Yi Yu-Jin and Goh Yun-Jong.

“Is it fine if we sit here?” (Yi Yu-Jin)

Since it was not a crime to do so, Jin Seh-Hahn/Kim Sae-Jin lightly nodded his head.

“By the way, your Trait seems really great. How amazing.” (Yi Yu-Jin)

As soon as she sat down, Yi Yu-Jin began speaking to him. The way she spoke was open and refreshing, as if she was a man among men or something.

“It’s uncool to ask about another person’s Trait, you know.” (Goh Yun-Jong)

And Goh Yun-Jong stopped her with a friendly, gentle voice as he sat down next to her. It was kind of like, the role of a boy and a girl had reversed somewhat...

“I know that already. But like I’m saying, if he gives us just a tiny bit of a hint, then the rest of us cadets would be grateful...” (Yi Yu-Jin)

Stopping her words temporarily, Yi Yu-Jin shoved a quarter of rice on top of her food tray into her mouth. What a truly manly man she was.

“*Gulp*. So? How about it? Surely, there will be team assignments coming soon, so if you let me know, we’ll help you out.” (Yi Yu-Jin)

Jin Seh-Hahn/Kim Sae-Jin silently studied the confident girl before slowly opening his mouth.

“What do you want to know?”

“Oh~. How refreshing, just like your beard. The thing is, it’s nothing much, really. That punch that blew away the Gnoll before – is that a one-time use thing, or can you use it nonstop?” (Yi Yu-Jin)

“...”

After figuring that Yi Yu-Jin was wishing it to be a one-time use attack...

“It’s the former.” (Sae-Jin)

...Sae-Jin replied thus. Since it didn’t matter even if he answered differently anyway.

“Oh, what a relief... No, that’s not what I meant...” (Yi Yu-Jin)

“Mhm. So this was where all of you were.”

Out of the blue, yet another person approached the table. This time, it was a devastatingly handsome and graceful young man, his black hair slightly dancing in the air.

“...And what the f*ck do you want here?” (Yi Yu-Jin)

As if their relationship wasn't good, Yi Yu-Jin sharply shot back at this guy.

"We are all cadets here, right? So, we can share a meal together."

However, the man whose name was Kim Myoung-Hahn, let out a slick smile and sat down on the empty seat.

"Well, then. You are Mister Jin Seh-Hahn, yes? My name is Kim Myoung-Hahn. I saw your Trait at work just now. Wow, that was quite something else. Even I was really surprised by it."

He spoke in a somewhat polite tone. Although there were traces of jealousy and wariness hidden in his words, to Sae-Jin, it was not much more than this boy acting rather cute.

"...Is that so?" (Sae-Jin)

"Indeed. And so, that is why... if it's not too much trouble, whether that punch is a single-use or not..." (Kim Myoung-Hahn)

Even this guy was asking about the exact same thing as Yi Yu-Jin. After making a half-hearted reply, Sae-Jin let out a long sigh.

He realised once more that these kids weren't even proper Knights yet; they were still a bunch of little chicks.

"They wouldn't even be able to open their mouths if they met the real me out in the society...' (Sae-Jin)

He found it a bit tough getting used to talking to these little chicks, after having kept company with big shots like Kim Yu-Rin, Joo Ji-Hyuk, Kim Yu-Sohn, Yi Hye-Rin, Yu Sae-Jung, etc, etc...

'...But, watching them fight over their rankings like this is kinda adorable, too.' (Sae-Jin)

"Oi, why do I need to stare at your ugly mug while I eat?" (Yi Yu-Jin)

"But that isn't a problem, no?" (Kim Myoung-Hahn)

Having an uncomfortable expression as she glared at Kim Myoung-Hahn in front of her – Yi Yu-Jin. Receiving her hostile stares with much gracefulness and leisure, Kim Myoung-Hahn.

“...You shouldn’t fight during a meal, you know?” (Goh Yun-Jong)

And Goh Yun-Jong, who was busy trying to stop the two.

It was kind of interesting looking at these three. As *they* once said, among all the fights out there, the most fun one to observe was the one about food, after all.

CHAPTER 98

EDEN, THE TOWER OF KNIGHTS (2)

“I thought you’d take up residence in the dormitory, too... well, whatever, see you tomorrow.” (Yi Yu-Jin)

“Let’s all pass this thing together, everyone.” (Goh Yun-Jong)

Exams had come to an end for the day; the sky above had darkened before they realised it – 8 o’clock in the evening. Yi Yu-Jin and Goh Yun-Jong spoke their piece and headed towards the dormitory located in the Tower of Eden.

Jin Seh-Hahn casually waved his hand and said his goodbyes, before making his way towards a deserted back alley quite a distance away from Eden. There, he changed back to Kim Sae-Jin and headed back home.

When he arrived, he found Yu Sae-Jung waiting for him as usual.

However, saying that she was waiting for him at home was a bit incorrect now.

Two toothbrushes in the bathroom; a huge king-sized bed much bigger than two people could ever occupy, located in the main bedroom, alongside a bedside dressing table; several high-heels within the shoe cabinet and two closets in the walk-in change room. His house that was entirely too big for a single man to live in had been filled up now, somewhat.

So, at this point in time, it’d be more accurate to say they were living together now, or maybe it was more like this was a newly-weds’ home instead.

“You came?”

While wearing a pair of cute bunny slippers, Yu Sae-Jung came to the entrance to welcome him home. He took off his coat and handed it over, and like a practiced housewife, she took it to the wash basket.

“Ha-ah...”

Kim Sae-Jin let out a long sigh as he lied down on the living room couch. She then stealthily approached him without getting noticed and began shooting him a faked resentful sideways glance.

“The work you’ve been doing must be keeping you busy? I mean, you left at 8 in the morning, only to return now.”

“...Yeah, kinda.”

Kim Sae-Jin smiled bitterly. This feeling of his body being numb and fatigued, he hadn’t felt it for a long time. Well, his actual physical condition was quite fine, but his mind was completely tired out. After all, it wasn’t a relaxing vacation to find himself in the middle of 200 or so people while busy minding their glares and eavesdropping on others bad mouthing him.

“I’m feeling really sleepy...”

While yawning out, he checked out the time. It was 9 in the evening. In around three hours, he’d have to assume the Monster Forms and wander around outside so he didn’t have much time left.

“...Heu mm.”

Yu Sae-Jung carefully observed him with meaningful gaze before jumping into his arms.

“Don’t give up, Oppa. Whenever you need the Dawn’s aid, just tell me. I’ll be able to do something, if it’s up to somewhere around a member of a parliament... Well, of course it’s my grandpa who’s going to do something, but if I ask him nicely, he won’t be able to refuse me.”

Within Sae-Jin’s embrace, she began fidgeting and showed a lot of *aegyo*. She looked so adorable acting like this, even as tired as he was, Sae-Jin just had to smile warmly at the sight.

He then realised why people went through so much trouble and pursued romance, seeing how comfortable he felt when someone was beside him and giving him encouragements.

“...Thank you.” (Sae-Jin)

Kim Sae-Jin wholeheartedly thanked her and pulled in closer. His body was definitely bigger than hers, yet he felt safe and comfortable as if he was the one being hugged tightly.

“What’s the point of being thankful, though? You haven’t even told me yet what you’re doing until now.” (Yu Sae-Jung)

Quickly seizing this chance, Yu Sae-Jung began acting like a spoiled child. However, Sae-Jin remained as firm as an iron wall.

“...That... Later. When you grow to like me even more, I’ll tell you everything. Absolutely everything.” (Sae-Jin)

Of course, he would have to tell her everything sooner or later.

But to him, precisely because she was his girlfriend, he found it hard to tell her the truth.

There was the matter of him changing into different Monsters, but more importantly, he had to be mindful of her status as the heir of the Dawn dynasty.

Technically speaking, he was a completely different ‘species’ compared to her. Although the passage of time might have softened his stance, a certain anecdote still made rounds, the one about the Dawn’s Chairman declaring to the world that his precious granddaughter would never marry a foreigner or her name would be removed from the Yu family register altogether.

She was someone he had to treasure more than anyone else out there, which only gave rise to several excuses to be reluctant about revealing the truth.

“But it’s impossible to like you even more than now. you know? It’s okay to tell me now, really!” (Yu Sae-Jung)

Totally oblivious to his inner thoughts, she maintained wide-open eyes and dug deeper into his embrace, then began tickling his side.

“How many times should I say it? I like you a lot, I love you a lot...” (Yu Sae-Jung)

“I know. I know, so please, be still.” (Sae-Jin)

Kim Sae-Jin embraced her tightly and stopped her from complaining.

And about five minutes of their hugging later.

“...Hm, hmm...”

Out of the blue, Yu Sae-Jung stealthily moved her hands and began fondling his butt. At first, her movement was over the surface of his training pants, but then, her hands invaded under the fabric and...

“What are you doing?” (Sae-Jin)

Kim Sae-Jin narrowed his eyes at the odd fondling he could feel around his a*s.

“...Well, uh... just because you’re tired, that doesn’t mean you should go to bed right away... But what gives? Even though I didn’t wanna do it, we still did it, but when it’s me, you don’t wanna?”

Yu Sae-Jung pouted and began fondling even more openly than before. As she did the deed many times with Sae-Jin, she had become quite more proactive compared to how she was like before.

“Fuhut. Hey, that tickles.”

Kim Sae-Jin finally exploded into a fit of giggles while looking at her as she continued to rub her body against his thighs.

The time remaining for him to get a shut-eye was less than three hours, but... well, this monstrous body of his only needed a couple of hours to recover from all the fatigue anyway.



The exams for the Knights continued on.

The second trial consisted of the cadets trying to escape from a bizarre ‘space’ located within the Tower after they were imprisoned there. The space was incredibly huge after some type of expansion magic was cast on it, enlarging it; decorated to resemble the great wilderness, it contained countless Monsters, wild beasts as well as numerous dangerous traps.

And even trapped within this jungle-like environment, Jin Seh-Hahn/Kim Sae-Jin broke past all trials and tribulations with empty hands. When Monsters and vicious beasts appeared, he just twisted their necks off; if there was an obstruction blocking his way, he blew it away with a single punch; and thanks to his sharp perception, he never fell into such small things as traps.

In the midst of all this, Jin Seh-Hahn didn't forget the core of this test, 'cooperation'. If a fellow cadet was faced with danger, he helped out, and if another cadet fell into a trap, he helped out again.

"He's definitely a genius worthy of the first place in the current rankings."

And since Jin Seh-Hahn was completely unmatched within the criteria of judging cadets, every single one of the high-ranking officials from the various Knights Orders who came to observe the proceedings were busy licking their lips, lights of greed shining in their eyes.

"Most of all, it is quite wonderful to see him take care of the fellow cadets." (Kim Yu-Rin)

Even the Highest Knight from the Raven Order, Kim Yu-Rin, was among those.

"Agreed... But isn't his background somewhat suspicious?" (Oh Jung-Hyuk)

This careful objection was raised by Vice Order Master of the Daebaek Knights Order, Oh Jung-Hyuk.

With his Knights Order's stock rising everyday, Oh Jung-Hyuk's shoulders had straightened quite a bit with pride nowadays. Of course, the reason for this rise in prominence was due to the title of 'only one of four Knights Orders in the country to possess an Athany doll' as well as being on friendly terms with The Monster Guild, so it was all dependent on the external factors.

But the truth was, new potential recruits began placing more and more emphasis on such points instead with every passing day.

"No fixed address, no known family members and a homeless bum to boot... But, his abilities are very good and judging from what he has shown so far, his personality seems also not bad." (Kim Yu-Rin)

“Huhuh. Looks like Miss Yu-Rin still believes in people a little too easily. We do not know what kind of dark ambitions sleep within that man, and since he’s a bum, he might even be blinded by wealth...”

Although Oh Jung-Hyuk was passionately and resolutely objecting to her evaluations, Yu-Rin had seen through his charade already. He might berate the person in question but on the day of the completion ceremony, without a doubt he’d proactively seduce Jin Seh-Hahn before anyone else had a chance.

“Well... if he has a dark side like what you’ve said, then I’m sure it’ll be revealed in all good time.” (Kim Yu-Rin)

Only one hour had passed since the test had begun.

There was no way she’d have enough free time to observe this test in entirety that was scheduled to last twelve hours, but still...

‘I should tell Hye-Rin to keep an eye out on the guy.’ (Kim Yu-Rin)

The story about the leader of the current pack of cadets being a very good seedling had been spreading around already, and now that she had seen them, there were a few more that caught her eyes, so she needed to keep her wits about her and catch them.



After the 12 hours-long test came to an end, the majority of the cadets had fallen down to the ground like dead logs and panted heavily from the exhaustion. Among them who maintained the best condition were, of course, Jin Seh-Hahn, Yi Yu-Jin, and Kim Myoung-Hwan – the top three picks of the invited observers.

“Uhm, excuse me...”

In the midst of this, five hesitating cadets suddenly approached Jin Seh-Hahn/Kim Sae-Jin as he was loosening his neck as he sat in the cross-legged position. Although he didn’t know their individual names, he still remembered their faces; he did rescue them from a trap earlier in the day, after all.

“What’s up?” (Sae-Jin)

“...Well, that... we came to say... thank you...”

Three boys and two girls lowered their heads hesitantly to express their gratitude. Jin Seh-Hahn/Kim Sae-Jin quietly gazed the group, and then...

“It’s cool.” (Sae-Jin)

He spoke that one line and stood up.

A thin smile spread on his lips. He thought that, although they spoke badly of him due to the sense of emptiness they all felt, these cadets still hadn’t let their humanity rot away yet.

“Oh~, looks like Ahjussi’s popularity is on the rise.” (Yi Yu-Jin)

Meanwhile, the energetic Yi Yu-Jin and the half-dead Goh Yun-Jong approached him.

“Let’s hurry up and eat!!”

“...I’m too tired to even eat...”

“Why do you complain all the time like a little girl, when you’re supposed to be a man?!”

Jin Seh-Hahn headed towards the cafeteria with the arguing duo – although, it clearly was a one-sided grilling.



The tests continued afterwards. On the third day, it was about hunting Monsters. On the fourth day, a traditional boot camp. On the fifth day, a reenactment of historical events, etc, etc... Three more excruciatingly painful days passed by, at least from the perspective of the cadets.

During this time period, the original number of 205 participants were reduced to mere 75. The rankings 205th to 76th had been all disqualified.

On the other hand, Jin Seh-Hahn continued his stranglehold on the 1st spot with a five-point margin over the 2nd place; meanwhile, Yi Yu-Jin and Kim Myoung-Hahn constantly fought over the 2nd and 3rd place, only a single point separating the two.

And so, on the sixth day.

Jin Seh-Hahn/Kim Sae-Jin was eating together with Yi Yu-Jin and her circle of “friends” after getting more friendlier with one another. Well, it wasn’t really about them getting more friendly, but actually, it was Yi Yu-Jin who one-sidedly approached him purely out of competitive spirit.

“...So, even Ahjussi is going to volunteer for a spot in Eden?” (Yi Yu-Jin)

As they ate, he even found something in common with Yi Yu-Jin. And that was, their ultimate destination being Eden.

“That’s right.” (Sae-Jin)

“How uncommon. To see two Knights from the same evaluation apply to enter Eden... Huhuh, well, I’ll be. As long as people like you two exist, dreams, hopes and ideals will never perish, I guess.” (Kim Myoung-Hahn)

At Kim Myoung-Hahn’s cynical taunts, Yi Yu-Jin’s forehead creased up in irritation.

“Why can’t you just shut the f*ck up. No wait, just get the hell away from me.” (Yi Yu-Jin)

“Hahah. I was simply stating the truth. What would you do, if you fail to enter Eden and become a repeat test taker...?” (Kim Myoung-Hahn)

With the reason of having a firm ‘conviction’, Eden disapproved of wanting to enter other Knights Orders. So, in the case one applied to enter Eden but failed – well, while carrying the sadness of knowing one would never be able to enter Eden, one had to become a repeat test taker and wait until the following year’s February.

“...Fuu. Ahjussi, just ignore that bastard, and let’s duel against each other in good faith. Even though my ranking is lower than yours, you know this too, right? That the final test gives out the highest scores. There will be enough chances for me to reverse the rankings soon enough.” (Yi Yu-Jin)

Jin Seh-Hahn/Kim Sae-Jin simply replied with a smile.

While they were conversing away in a not-very important topic, the door to the cafeteria opened and the instructor entered. The new instructor was also someone Sae-Jin could recognise – Kim In-Soo, the Knight who was trying to show off before getting properly schooled by Sae-Jin way back when.

Sae-Jin nearly laughed out loudly when he saw In-Soo's face, but held it back somehow. His cheeks were so chubby now – just how did he gain so much weight?

“How do you do, ladies and gentlemen. I'm a High Tier Knight from the Genesis Order, Kim In-Soo.”

Proportional to the increase in the girth of his body, his Tier had increased by another level as well.

“We'll start the test for the sixth day soon. And the test for the day is – dueling in front of the observers. With the observers from the various Knights Orders watching you, you will duel against other cadets on the duel arena.” (Kim In-Soo)

Right away, cadets tensed up. Obviously, a duel would best demonstrate the combat abilities of Knights, but actually, the end results depended heavily on who the opponents were.

“There will be two types of duels. Firstly, cadets will compete with each other. In this case, the 1st spot in the rankings will have the first choice, and the cadet chosen by the 1st spot will naturally lose his or her right to chose.” (Kim In-Soo)

The cadets suddenly began checking out the mood of Sae-Jin's table where the first three rankers were seated.

However, Yi Yu-Jin was only staring hard at Jin Seh-Hahn's direction. Because, this was the chance to reverse the rankings that she had mentioned just now.

“And the second duel will be against an expert. In order to accurately measure your abilities, we secured the aid of someone quite beautiful and important this time.” (Kim In-Soo)

“ ... ”

Wait a damn minute.

Kim Sae-Jin suddenly had a bad premonition. He began recollecting the conversation he had with Yu Sae-Jung about two days ago.

– I decided to do a job my dad asked me to do, as a commemoration of me becoming a upper Mid Tier.

– But you became a upper Mid Tier because of my Tattoos, though... Okay, fine. What kind of a job is it?

–... Well, Oppa did help me out there, that's true. But whatever, the thing is, quite a few talented newbie Knights are showing up, so... Ah, it's a secret. Oppa doesn't want to tell me his, so this will be my secret.

At the time, Sae-Jin didn't think much about it, but...

“That expert is the world's youngest upper Mid Tier Knight, the Dawn Knights Order's Miss Yu Sae-Jung.” (Kim In-Soo)

At this unexpected announcement of a celebrity arriving soon, all the cadets carried a stunned expression.

Among them, Jin Seh-Hahn's facial change was particularly honest.

CHAPTER 99

EDEN, THE TOWER OF KNIGHTS (3)

“Ahjussi, do it with me.” (Yi Yu-Jin)

As soon as Kim In-Soo turned around and left, Yi Yu-Jin asked Sae-Jin for a fight.

On the seventh day, which would be the next day, it was reserved for things like measuring of Mana and Magic strength, psychological tests, and having interviews with Knights Orders, so realistically, this was it for her to reverse the rankings. However, Yi Yu-Jin looked a bit anxious, since if Sae-Jin refused, then that would be the end.

“...”

Unfortunately, Jin Seh-Hahn/Kim Sae-Jin was dazedly staring at the empty air and didn't reply to her request. Feeling a little frustrated, Yi Yu-Jin grasped his arm and shook it. Only then, he turned his head towards her direction.

“Let's do it.” (Yi Yu-Jin)

“...Do what?” (Sae-Jin)

“The duel.” (Yi Yu-Jin)

“Uh... Ah... Sure thing.” (Sae-Jin)

At his easier-than-expected agreement, her expressions turned weird. But that only lasted for a short while. She began energetically smiling.

“As expected, Ahjussi is really manly and straight forward! No backing out now, right?”
(Yi Yu-Jin)

“Yeah, sure.” (Sae-Jin)

And so, the meal time came to an end and the cadets started performing light exercises to prepare for the upcoming duels.

One hour later.

All the remaining cadets gathered at a huge dueling arena on the fourth floor of the Tower.

Kim In-Soo told the cadets to greet the observers hidden from the view, and so, they bent their backs 90 degrees. That signaled the beginning of the duels.

Most cadets thought that the procession might become rather tedious as there were a fair number of participants, but when the things actually got going, every battle lasted only for a way, way too brief moment.

No, that didn't mean high-ranked cadets chose to fight against a low-ranked ones, though. The thing was, these high-ranked cadets were mindful of the scoring system and so, they tried not to fight against opponents with too low a rank, but then, many low-ranked cadets who were confident of their chances in duel began provoking the high ranked ones instead, and somehow, successfully got the duels going.

SFX for lights (?) falling

"...Ohhh."

A flash of light shooting out from Goh Yun-Jong's blade melted a nameless male cadet's sword, thereby ending the 35th duel. And it had been only 25 minutes after the start of this whole duel thing.

"The 9th ranked, Goh Yun-Jong, winner."

"Nicely done!" (Yi Yu-Jin)

Elated by the victory of her friend, Yi Yu-Jin stood up from her seat and shouted out loudly.

"Next, Yi Yu-Jin and Jin Seh-Hahn. Come up on the arena."

Her joy only lasted for a brief moment, however. As soon as her name was called out, her face became incomparably stiff.

Jin Seh-Hahn/Kim Sae-Jin made his way up on the arena first and she followed him up soon after.

As the two of them faced against each other, different lines of thoughts flowed in their minds.

‘...Now how should I handle this? Do it with one punch, just like until now?’ (Sae-Jin)

‘Surely, he has no experience in duels like this, so I must not give him time to get organised and attack him right away... But, something doesn’t feel right. Maybe, I should take my time, and wait for a gap... ’ (Yi Yu-Jin)

It was kind of obvious that Yi Yu-Jin’s thoughts were a lot more weighty compared to her opponent’s.



“Who do you think will win?”

Observers couldn’t hide their excitement as the main match was about to get under way.

“I still believe Yi Yu-Jin would win this one. Yi Yu-Jin might have graduated from the Academy at a younger age than Yu Sae-Jung, but she’s a Knight who is willing to become a repeat test taker just for an opportunity to enter Eden. There should be quite a gap between the two as far as actual combat strength is concerned.”

Observers spoke out their own educated opinions. Someone said that, after using a special finishing move, the duel would end quickly, judging by what had gone before. Some disagreed and said their skill levels were similar so it might continue on for at least 5 minutes...

But in the midst of this, out of the blue, a shout loud enough to shock everyone into stupor exploded out from the arena below them.

“...That’s the end! The 1st ranked, Jin Seh-Hahn, winner!”

Even the referee’s voice was trembling, as if he was confused somewhat.

“...What was that?” (Kim Yu-Rin)

Stunned by that sudden, unexpected announcement, Kim Yu-Rin quickly got up from her seat and with her own two eyes, checked the situation at the dueling arena. There

was Yi Yu-Jin toppled over, clutching her stomach, while standing in front, Jin Seh-Hahn looking at the girl, his fist clenched tight.

The duel was clearly over.

“...Keum.” (Sae-Jin)

Jin Seh-Hahn/Kim Sae-Jin scratched the back of his neck, looking embarrassed slightly. He wasn’t planning to finish things up this fast... but even he didn’t expect Yi Yu-Jin to madly dash towards him, and so, he ended up swinging his fist.

And the result of that simple punch was this.

“...**pant**... **groan**...”

Yi Yu-Jin was drooling all over the ground while unable to recover her wits; meanwhile, all the other cadets were dumbfoundedly staring at him.

“M, my luck is pretty good, eh. Didn’t expect you to move the way I wanted you to. Really, my luck is the best.” (Sae-Jin)

...He felt the need to say something under those intense gazes, so, he did.



After the first stage of the duel had come to an end, cadets rested their bodies while waiting for the expert’s arrival.

Jin Seh-Hahn/Kim Sae-Jin continuously chugged down bottles of water as he got nervous about running into Yu Sae-Jung. On the side, Yi Yu-Jin remained silent, totally downtrodden. There were traces of tears on the corners of her eyes, even.

“Oh, wowsers!!”

It was then, Yu Sae-Jung made her entrance.

She was, without a doubt, an idol.

Not only the quietly-seated cadets stood up quickly in order to take a good look at her, even the referee for the duel, Kim In-Soo, stood there totally dazed as he gazed at the

woman who seemed to exhibit a bit more mature charm than before.

SFX for soles of high heels making noise

Despite coming to duel, Yu Sae-Jung wore a pair of high-heels. She ascended the arena and spoke while sweeping her gaze over the cadets.

“...My evaluation standard is straightforward. If you can withstand one strike from me, I’ll give you a fair amount of score.” (Yu Sae-Jung)

Yu Sae-Jung’s attitude was incredibly cold and distant, which was completely different from when she was with Sae-Jin in private.

“Since I don’t have a lot of time, let’s start quickly, from the bottom. The last person in the rankings, please come up.” (Yu Sae-Jung)

And the second half of the duels – or, in this case, ‘guidance’, began in this manner and ended faster than the first half. None of the 70 or so cadets could receive Yu Sae-Jung’s strike with a wooden sword, so the whole thing only needed about ten minutes or so.

There were six different types of Magic Tattoos inscribed on her small and petite frame; Sae-Jin finally got to see for himself just what kind of a mini-monster he had inadvertently created here.

“Next... Yi Yu-Jin?” (Yu Sae-Jung)

“Yes, here~!”

Yi Yu-Jin replied back loudly and quickly dashed forward. Although there was only a two-year gap between the two, seeing the overwhelming appearance of her role model, twinkling lights had returned in full force within her eyes.

“Well then, shall we get started?” (Yi Yu-Jin)

Yu Sae-Jung spoke as she lightly swung the wooden sword. Although it looked light and weak, the amount of pressure Yi Yu-Jin felt crashing down on her was far beyond her expectations.

“Uh-aht!!”

Yi Yu-Jin let out a strange shout and somehow, was able to endure the strike by the skin of her teeth.

Yu Sae-Jung began counting up to five while maintaining the strength and Mana she imbued in the sword, and then withdrew the weapon.

“Heu uh uh...”

Becoming dead-tired after encountering that one attack, Yi Yu-Jin plopped down on the floor, her legs shaking uncontrollably.

“Very good.” (Yu Sae-Jung)

Cadets began clapping their hands as the second person to pass after Kim Myoung-Hahn had appeared.

“Okay, and next is...?”

Finally, Kim Sae-Jin in Jin Seh-Hahn’s disguise hesitantly entered the dueling arena.

But well, the way Yu Sae-Jung was staring at him seemed to indicate something was afoot.

“...Shall we?” (Yu Sae-Jung)

“...Sure.” (Sae-Jin)

Since Sae-Jin’s voice had become deeper due to the Beastification, he was not too worried, but still... Quite strangely, instead of attacking him, Yu Sae-Jung began to carefully study his facial features.

“Heu mm...”

He thought he might get discovered if this continued, so he rushed forward first, instead.

“...?!”

Her face, flushed with an unexpected surprise, and a wooden sword loaded with Mana coming down right afterwards.

Sae-Jin grasped that sword with his bare hand and stood there ‘enduring’ for about ten seconds, before determining that this should be enough and let go.

“ ... ”

And to put the finishing touch, he deliberately let his legs tremble and plopped down on the floor as well.

Yu Sae-Jung narrowed her brows and stared at this guy, before opening her mouth.

“...Very good, but still...” (Yu Sae-Jung)

...This man, I feel like I've seen him before somewhere.

However, she didn't blurt out the words that might increase her time staying here. Going home early from one's duties would only make one feel good, after all.

“That's it for today, then. End of the test. I'll be on my way first.” (Yu Sae-Jung)

While singing inwardly, she quickly moved her feet while happily imagining a certain someone potentially waiting for her back home.



And so, that was how the Knight evaluation test had come to a disappointing end.

Jin Seh-Hahn had refused all the earnest invitations from the various Knights Orders and volunteered to work for Eden; and currently, he was leisurely waiting for the reply that would arrive in a week's time.

The day was an ordinary Summer's Saturday, when the weather was really stuffy and the baking heat was infused into the blowing winds.

Inside the aircon-cooled house, Kim Sae-Jin was gently stroking the back of the sleeping Yu Sae-Jung while quietly thinking to himself.

‘I wonder who might win in a fight between the Orc Chieftain and the Lycanthrope...’

...Well, his thoughts weren't all that important, though.

Whatever the case may have been, he was really enjoying these past couple days of peace. It was then, a beam of light shone from a certain crystal nearby. A magic communication from Kim Yu-Sohn had come in, so Sae-Jin hurriedly picked it up.

“Hello.”

– *“Sir, it’s Kim Yu-Sohn.”*

“Yes.”

Kim Yu-Sohn wasn’t someone who’d contact him for no reason. His voice seemed heavier than normal as well.

– *“I had a dream, sir.”*

“...”

Whenever he said that, Sae-Jin’s heart felt like it would stop beating for a moment. A conditioned reflex he developed, where his anticipation and the dread of what might come next were blended together.

– *“It seems that... going forward, the future might get a little difficult, sir.”*

“Can you give me the details?”

– *“I saw the scenes of countless boss-level Monsters flooding the world, sir. The monster bird from before was nothing more than just the beginning. And it’s not just Korea, either – when I saw the broken bits of news broadcast flashing by in my dreams, even the different distant countries will be suffering similar events.”*

Kim Sae-Jin became speechless as this revelation was just too sudden.

– *“That is why, there’s a great need for us to prepare from here onwards.”*

“...You say... preparations?”

– *“Yes, sir. Within the basement of our Guild, we have numerous Goblins, as well as Griffins and Hero Orcs that grow stronger each passing day. However... these won’t be enough going forward, at least from the visions I saw in my dream. I suggest we strengthen Knights Orders who are friendly with the Guild...”*

Unlike his past self, Kim Yu-Sohn's words were lengthy, disorganised and hurried, which meant Sae-Jin couldn't quite grasp what the veteran Mercenary was trying to say.

There was a reason why Kim Yu-Sohn was feeling the urgency, however.

"Well, for now... I don't quite understand it but regardless, I shall do what Mister Kim Yu-Sohn has recommended. Please, talk to Mister Jo Hahn-Sung and set a plan of action for the future."

– *"Yes, sir... I understand."*

Kim Yu-Sohn replied powerlessly.

Calamities created heroes; Kim Sae-Jin and his Guild met the necessary conditions and possessed abilities to become exactly that; with Sae-Jin's abilities to pump out countless potions which would be highly sought-after in the upcoming troubled times, as well as to craft fine weapons, Vampires and their sinister plans could be rendered all useless.

Plus, the fame, wealth and the honour of the Guild and its Master, Kim Sae-Jin, would literally shoot towards the heavens.

However, there was a thin line separating between a 'Hero' and a 'Monster'. One wrong step, and a hero would become a monster in no time.

And Kim Sae-Jin's mind wasn't really settled at the moment. In the dreams Yu-Sohn had every now and then, Sae-Jin was always worried and fearful. Maybe he couldn't sense it consciously, but his purest sense of self where his Human and Monster Forms were all blended into one and rooted deeply within, was certainly feeling that way.

"In that case, sir, I shall give you a call again after having a meeting with Mister Jo Hahn-Sung." (Kim Yu-Sohn)

– *"Please do."*

Kim Yu-Sohn ended the communication with those words and let out a long sigh.

The dream he experienced this time was quite lengthy. He could see the majority of it. That was why he remembered the words "回光返照 (회광반조)". (TL: Hwee-Gwang-

Ban-Joh. Sorry for leaving it in the raw Hanja form. The literal meaning is “the sun’s light brightening up the sky just before it sets”. Basically, one’s mind clearing up moments before death, or something close to that effect.)

“...Kehuep!!”

Suddenly, he sensed something rushing out of his throat, so he quickly covered up his mouth with his hand. Dark crimson liquid escaped between his fingers and dripped down to the floor.

“...Keuheum.”

After throwing up the blood, Yu-Sohn quietly gazed at the crimson stain on the floor. He could clearly feel that he didn’t have much time left – this damn Vampire’s curse that was eating away what little life he had left.

‘I hope that my son, Sun-Ho, can do a good job after I’m gone.’

Yu-Sohn had properly educated his son before all this, and he, Sun-Ho, was already performing a lot of work as the head of the Mercenaries. So, he’d have little trouble continuing on with his legacy.

But still, he seemed to have trouble dealing with Kim Sae-Jin.

Sae-Jin didn’t mind letting someone else take charge. No, he was the type of person who actually welcomed it as long as there were no ulterior motives. This came about because of a lot of fear accumulating within him that made him worry about making the wrong decisions – especially more so, if the effects of his decisions could create large ripples.

‘...I should create an opportunity for a sit-down soon.’

With darkened eyes, Kim Yu-Sohn stared at the world outside the window. The bright and fine sunlight cascaded down to earth. It was truly a beautiful image, worthy to be titled the ‘ordinary life’.

CHAPTER 100

THE RIGHT START (1)

After finishing up the magic communication with Kim Yu-Sohn, Sae-Jin shared breakfast with Yu Sae-Jung.

“Ah, right. Oppa, a few days ago, I saw a person who looked strangely like you.”

Although his head was still aching due to the serious nature of the communication he had just now, those words coming out of Yu Sae-Jung’s mouth held more than enough power to make him pay close attention.

“What do you mean by that...?” (Sae-Jin)

Feeling guilty, Sae-Jin responded as quick as the flash of light as soon as she finished saying her words.

“Ah, well, the thing is, I took on the job of an instructor for the Knight evaluation exams’ duels. That’s where I saw that person.” (Yu Sae-Jung)

“...Really?”

“Mm. On top of that, even though he was supposed to be a cadet, I was really surprised because he was so much stronger than any other cadets there. Maybe it’s true that there’s a doppelganger resembling each of us out there somewhere. With Oppa, and that guy, it was really strange, you know? It was su~per interesting.”

While speaking, Yu Sae-Jung took a sneaky glance at Sae-Jin’s direction to see his reaction, whether he’d show some form of jealousy with this... However, all he did was put the spoon down rather coldly without showing an expression.

“...What’s the matter? It doesn’t taste good again?” (Yu Sae-Jung)

Seeing this, Yu Sae-Jung asked, slightly worried.

“Ah, no. It’s not that, just... Kinda curious, since you say he resembles me. So, what happened to that cadet?” (Sae-Jin)

“Oh, that. Well, even I’m unhappy regarding that part. I was planning to persuade him at the completion ceremony, you know? But it turns out, he had already refused invitations from all the other Knights Orders, including the Raven. I asked around, and apparently, he’s applying to enter Eden.” (Yu Sae-Jung)

“Really?”

She then nodded her head.

“Ng, right. Eden’s entry barrier is uselessly tough, but then, their treatment of the members is lots worse when compared to the Dawn... Sure, your ranks might rise nice and easy during the evaluation exams since there’s the special consideration applied when working for Eden, but still, I can’t understand why he made a choice like that.”

She began to sing like a canary all on her own. But she still hadn’t spoken about the most important part yet.

“...So, does that mean Eden is going to drop him, then?” (Sae-Jin)

“Huh? What have you been listening to, Oppa? I said, even I was surprised by him, you know? He’s obviously been accepted.” (Yu Sae-Jung)

“For real?”

“Yeah. I asked directly, via my dad. I was planning to snag him after a half year’s wait if he got dropped, but, oh well.” (Yu Sae-Jung)

Maintaining the best poker-face he could make, Sae-Jin nodded.

It was done. As soon as he displayed an almighty growth without restraint and reach the upper Mid Tier, then...

“Oppa, you weren’t listening to me again just now, were you? What were you thinking about? Is it another woman?” (Yu Sae-Jung)

“...Huh?! What are talking about?”

“Didn’t you say you are going somewhere with Hazeline Unni soon? Weren’t you thinking about the trip?” (Yu Sae-Jung)

She was making a joke, but her words still contained a slight amount of her true feelings and a bit of worry.

“No way. Besides, that’s just for business. You know, related to Alchemy...”

And so, at the sudden and swift change in the topic of conversation, Sae-Jin began hastily giving away his best excuses.



One week later.

Just like the Yu Sae-Jung’s spoiler, Kim Sae-Jin could become an honoured Knight of Eden as Jin Seh-Hahn. It seemed that the Eden’s insignia, made out of pure platinum, possessed a certain magnetic charm that made Knights of other top Orders take envious glances at its wearers.

“Ahjussi, let’s do a good job.”

Standing right next to him during the accolade, the knighting ceremony, was Yi Yu-Jin. He still could clearly remember that after getting defeated at the duels, she cried her eyes out with the thought of failing to enter Eden taking a toll on her. However, her sole aim for the past six years studying in the Academy was just to enter Eden and it seemed such a conviction was rated highly enough by the management of Eden in the end.

“...” (Sae-Jin)

“We’ll be seeing each other lots more in the future, so I don’t think it’s okay to not say anything to your colleague, though?” (Yi Yu-Jin)

During the accolade as well as after its end, when they were walking out of the Tower, Yi Yu-Jin yapped on and on nonstop.

But her chattiness couldn’t continue on forever.

“They are coming out!”

The matter of two Knights emerging from a single exam who got accepted by Eden, was a great source of pride for the whole country, especially considering that there

was only one successful entrant in the last three years.

“...What the hell is this?” (Yi Yu-Jin)

Already, countless reporters were camping out in front of the Tower. Yi Yu-Jin and Kim Sae-Jin both narrowed their brows at the same time as the camera flashes exploded all around the two and loud shouts disguised as questions were thrown at them.

“But they never entered the Tower’s grounds before...” (Yi Yu-Jin)

“Both of you! We’d like to hear your thoughts on becoming Eden’s Knights!!”
(Unnamed reporter 1)

“We heard that the Knight Jin Seh-Hahn was originally a homeless...” (Unnamed reporter 2)

“Knight Yi Yu-Jin, please turn your pretty face this way!!” (Unnamed reporter 3)

...Sae-Jin had always felt this, but the people from the station MBS who asked that last question were truly a swarm of smelly houseflies.

“Wow, just what is the heck this?” (Yi Yu-Jin)

Yi Yu-Jin panicked and stopped moving as the huge wave of people descended down on her. It was then, Kim Sae-Jin, as Jin Seh-Hahn, sent a meaningful gaze towards her and bravely stepped forward. In all honesty, though, there was no bravery involved here. He had done so many press conferences already, it was like they had become a part of his life at this point in time.

“He’s coming!” (Another unnamed reporter)

The waves of reporters then diverted towards Jin Seh-Hahn instead.

“Please tell us your thoughts!!”

“Are you satisfied with becoming an Eden’s Knight?”

“What are your goals, hey move aside, man!! Now that you’ve become an Eden’s Knight... your goal... Eu ark!! Help!”

“My goal is... Let’s rescue that guy first before he’s crushed to death.” (Sae-Jin)

“Whew-woo. T, thank you very much.” (Unnamed reporter)

“My goal is quite simple. It’s to rise to upper Mid Tier within the next six months.” (Sae-Jin)

Kim Sae-Jin had no need to lie, nor did he feel like lying in the first place. That was why, on this occasion, he replied truthfully with words that were honest from his perspective, but from the views of the gathered reporters, rather gallant and arrogant.

For a short moment – for about one second or so, the stillness ruled the world. But soon enough, countless camera flashes went off once more. While busy snapping Sae-Jin’s pictures, these reporters were already cooking up headlines that could cause the maximum amount of controversy.

An Eden’s Knight received more advantages in comparison to other Knights within the same Tier. After all, successfully entering Eden meant that one’s abilities and future potential were greater than the others.

But still, becoming a upper Mid Tier Knight within six months? Even a Knight possessing heaven-defying talent and Trait could not hope to achieve such a feat.

“Hahaha. That is quite a bold declaration!! What will follow after that? The world’s greatest Knight? Or better still, the King of the Knights?” (Reporter)

“I aim to become a High Tier Knight within one year. Ah, right. When I say one year, I didn’t mean one year after the six months spent in becoming a upper Mid Tier. It’s one year from now.” (Sae-Jin)

Seemingly unaffected by the sarcastic tone of the reporter’s question, Sae-Jin boldly replied. And the intensity of the camera flashes and questions only increased afterwards.

“Uh-whew...”

Using the gap created by the attention of reporters drawn towards Jin Seh-Hahn, Yi Yu-Jin could finally escape the human barrier.

“Yu-Jin~.”

And then, Goh Yun-Jong, who was waiting at some distance away, approached her with a welcoming smiling that suited his personality to a T.

“...What are you doing here? Are you waiting for me? You sure do like to waste your time, don’t you?” (Yi Yu-Jin)

Acting in an attitude rather contrary to what the bright smile blooming on her face indicated, Yu-Jin put her arm around the shoulder of Goh Yun-Jong who had a similar height as her.

“Let’s get out of here. As a celebration of becoming Eden’s Knights, I’ll buy us a really expensive meal.” (Yi Yu-Jin)



[A new Knight of Eden, Jin Seh-Hahn, aiming to become the best Knight in the world within a year...] [Rising past the High Tier and into the Highest within a year? The confident new addition to the Eden’s ranks.]

On the following day, news articles like the above flooded the airwaves.

As expected, all the Knights in various Orders were outraged.

“...Isn’t he a crazy a*shole?” (Disgruntled Knight 1)

“Not only crazy, but a goddamn fraud, too.” (Disgruntled Knight 2)

For these folks, they could become a Knight only after sacrificing their most-important developing teenage years under the pretext of training. But now, a bloody hobo who seemingly had never put in effort in anything was looking down on the rest of Knights, simply because he awakened a nice Trait?

“A bastard who doesn’t even have any skills... When is he going to show up at our Order?”

Normally, an Eden’s Knight was given the right to enter or leave any Knights Orders in the country, as they were seen as the so-called “All-Purpose Knight”. Of course, the Eden’s Knights could only enter non-restricted areas such as cafeterias and training grounds, but if the need arose, it was possible for them to partake in missions together with the Knights from other Orders.

“When he shows up, I’m going to rip him up a new one during a duel.” (Disgruntled Knight 3)

...And so, the man who was being bad mouthed by not only the Knights in the Dawn Order but by practically everyone else in the country, Jin Seh-Hahn/Kim Sae-Jin was in the midst of leisurely attending a callout.

As if he was flying in the sky, he kicked the ground and soared up high, arriving at the outskirts of the Gangwon Province.

SFX for a loud roar of a Monster

His target this time was a pair of Troll ‘brothers’ who were causing havoc on a road with the marking ‘School’ painted on. No one knew how these two Monsters had made their way this far, but to Sae-Jin, this event was nothing more than a day’s work to fill up his performance quota.

“Kyaaaahck!!”

“Eu ah ahrk!!”

The students leaving school to head back home began scattering away as soon as the Trolls appeared, but still, a handful of girls couldn’t do that as they fell on the ground, fear robbing them of their leg strength. All they could do was to cry endlessly while hoping that this was just a bad dream.

SFX for pitiful sobbing

A large shadow drew upon a female student who was busy massaging her twisted ankle as she sobbed pitifully. Through her eyes, only open in a narrow slit, she confirmed the horrifying arm of the Troll raised up high into the sky. It was impossible for her to think any further than this. Her head was blanking out...

SFX for a loud explosion

The road trembled at the powerful shock wave.

And then, the Troll’s arm raised up high began falling back down rather weakly.

Kkhoong-

A Troll collapsed on its knees; and sensing something was wrong, the female student opened her tightly-shut eyes ever so carefully.

She saw the back of a certain man. It was the type of back that was so broad and dependable, the type that restored the peace of mind.

“Ah...”

When the female student let out a soft gasp of astonishment, the dude took a glance towards her. To her, this man looked like a model from overseas, no, a piece of an artwork, even with the lengthy beard that could be seen as a definite minus point by all women.

“Run away now.” (Sae-Jin)

After speaking out those simple yet weighty words, he stepped forward towards the remaining Troll. Watching him preparing for a fierce battle, even the Troll became tensed up and it let out a loud roar.

SFX for a loud roar

But Kim Sae-Jin didn't back away. Only that, he poured all his power to take the next step forward and then, shot out like a bullet towards the Monster.

SFX for yet another loud roar of a Troll

The Troll responded by punching out.

And so, a gigantic fist and a comparably puny hand met in the middle.

However, the winner of this encounter was rather plainly obvious.

The moment the two fists met, the Troll's hand and the arm simply crumbled like a piece of soft tofu. After losing its limb with only a single strike, the Troll staggered about disoriented, but then got its heart pierced by the subsequent punch and died on the spot.

“...”

“...”

The street once filled with screams had now fallen utterly silent. Every citizen present dazedly stared at the bearded man.

“Keum...”

However, the bearded man did a fake cough as if he was embarrassed by all the attention he had garnered, and he quickly kicked the ground and left the area towards a destination unknown.

Like a flittering mirage under the broad daylight, all these events had come to its swift conclusion less than one minute later.



It didn't take too long a time to confirm what Kim Yu-Sohn's dream was all about.

The time now was two weeks after Kim Sae-Jin had killed the two Trolls with the new identity as the Eden's Knight.

Just about every headlines appearing on newspapers and broadcasts were shouting “Monster assault incidents”. Throughout every corner of the country, from the densely-populated cities to sparse rural areas, on average, 40 incidents of Monsters assaulting citizens broke out and over 300 people lost their lives every day.

The world quivered in fear at this unexplainable situation.

However, during the time of unrest, heroes were destined to be born.

[This time, also the Knight of Eden, Jin Seh-Hahn? Solo killing an Ogre that appeared in the city of Gangwon.] [The advent of a new hero... A Knight who used to be a hobo; the reason why attention focuses on Jin Seh-Hahn.]

The media couldn't control their excitement at the timely advent of a new hero.

Possessing an unrivalled macho fighting style where he would kill any Monster with a single punch. And with a sad backstory of being a homeless; then, not pursuing wealth and instead choosing Eden; a man with a dramatic life and overflowing with righteous conviction.

Almost all the media outlets beautifully played around with all of these facts and

thanks to that, only after three weeks since he began his activity, Jin Seh-Hahn had become the hottest news item in South Korea.

Although, the truth was that many Knights still denounced him as a 'manufactured hero', remembering that 'arrogant' interview Jin Seh-Hahn gave after the accolade.

Whatever. His fame and popularity soared higher everyday. And his particular fighting style also attracted the attention of the Knight Academy.

"We at the Academy would like to utilise the footage of your battle style... but will it be okay with you? Oh, of course, we will pay you the appropriate royalties as well."
(Academy official)

Eden was seen as an 'All-Purpose' Knights Order, so its Knights had the qualifications to participate in any and all events related to Monsters. However, such qualifications meant that there were responsibilities to handle as well. Jin Seh-Hahn had to meet a representative from the Knights Academy at the request of Eden's higher-ups.

"...You say, my footage?" (Sae-Jin)

"Yes. Mister Jin Seh-Hahn's fighting style has, in its own unique way, has its own uses, and it's also popular currently as well, so... Our thoughts are, by using the footage of your fighting style as an educational material, won't we be able to bring forth a positive change? Ah, and also, there's the matter of profits earned from royalties. We don't hold normal type of classes but instead, they are structured as an one-on-one lecture with an instructor and so, students can choose which classes they enter. Parents seems to go with the flow of popularity, so if we take into account the fame of Mister Jin Seh-Hahn... well, I believe the profit should be substantial." (Academy official)

Not thinking too deeply, Jin Seh-Hahn just nodded his head. If, because of him, the talents of young cadets could blossom, then wouldn't that be a good thing, all things considered? Of course, the truth of the matter was, the 'fist attack' was simply a 'bonus' derived from the Skill 'Weapon Mastery', but still... If someone wished to follow in his footsteps, then surely, there would be someone out there who might be able to.

"Yeah, sure. Let's do it." (Sae-Jin)

"Oh!!"

The representative of the Academy didn't have as simple line of thought as Sae-Jin did, so it couldn't be helped that he got deeply stunned by Jin Seh-Hahn/Kim Sae-Jin easily agreeing to it.

Now normally, most Knights tried their best to avoid showing the footage of their battles publically the higher their Tiers rose. The excuse given was that their weaknesses could be revealed to the world, but really, it would not feel all that nice to see someone else 'copying' their moves.

But this Jin Seh-Hahn readily agreed to it. Despite the fact that he could remain as a unique individual, he didn't even put forward any other conditions. Even with this much, the representative had so much to be thankful for... but what he heard next made his jaw drop all the way to the floor.

"By the way, I don't need the royalties." (Sae-Jin)

His reason was simple. He just had too much money right now. Actually, he would not be able to exhaust it even if he spent it willy-nilly right up until his death...

"Instead, make lectures with my footage free to attend, or give cadets scholarships with it." (Sae-Jin)

"....."

The representative forgot his words.

This day, he felt it right down to his bones. That beard, goatee, those thick lines of his face, that fierce look – they were nothing but a mere shell. This man's true personality was just like that of a generous saint, something that couldn't be compared to anyone...

"Well, if that is all." (Sae-Jin)

After letting the representative taste a new and fresh type of shock, Jin Seh-Hahn rose up from his seat.

To realise how wrong he was when he blindly pursued the ideals of unchecked Capitalism – the Academy official felt a huge pang of remorse as he continued to longingly gaze at the departing back of Jin Seh-Hahn.

CHAPTER 101

THE RIGHT START (2)

“The profession of Alchemy is all about creating value out of things that are of little worth by themselves. Not only is it a platform for concocting potions but also...”

Every single person present here wore thick hoods covering their heads like a bunch of criminals – and here being, a conference organised by the Alchemy Association. And as expected, it was quite a boring affair. It wasn't only Sae-Jin who thought like this, but his companion sitting next to him, Hazeline, also thought so as well, judging by how often she yawned out and sighed deeply as the proceedings continued.

“Just when is this going to end?” (Sae-Jin)

The reason why he attended this conference as the Master of the Guild and not as the Goblin Alchemist, was rather simple.

The efforts of the Goblin Alchemist had stirred up the other Alchemists and that led to the Korean potion market going through an unprecedented boom right now. And so, with a surplus of potion supplies locally, he was planning to export to overseas markets that were suffering from acute potion shortages.

“...Please wait for a little while longer. It'll be our turn soon to announce the ‘innovative new plan’ of the Goblin Alchemist. As soon as that's done, we'll leave.” (Hazeline)

He continued to yawn out while waiting for their turn to come. And so, five minutes passed by, then ten minutes, then another twenty... his valuable time was slowly bleeding away.

“There is currently a certain Alchemist who is receiving a lot of attention from all over the world, and he is the Goblin Alchemist. One or two among us here have either called him the inheritor of Rodes's legacy, or as the revolutionary of the Alchemical profession.”

“Well, I should get going now. When I call for you, Mister Sae-Jin should come up to the stage and read off the script we prepared before.” (Hazeline)

Hazeline lightly tapped Sae-Jin's shoulder and while lowering her head, disappeared off to somewhere.

"And now, we would like to welcome the manager of the Yoseon Alchemy House, who had discovered that very Alchemist, to the stage."

Hazeline walked up on the stage. As Alchemists didn't enjoy raising loud ruckus, not one of them clapped hands. Only that, a handful of them shot gazes of envy and jealousy towards the stage.

"Ke, keum."

Her entire body hidden under a thick robe, Hazeline surveyed the surroundings for a bit before swallowing down her saliva.

"...H, h, h, hello. E, e, e, e, everyone."

...And then, a catastrophe began unfolding.



Hazeline and Kim Sae-Jin made their announcement of exporting the Goblin Alchemist's potions overseas. As expected of a Dark Elf who had never stepped on a stage in front of so many people, Hazeline's speech was all over the place, full of stuttering and going off topic constantly. But since it was seen as a normal thing, Alchemists simply accepted the presentation without much problem.

"Your new car is really nice and comfortable." (Hazeline)

After safely (?) negotiating her way out of the seminar, they were currently returning home in Sae-Jin's new car. Hazeline was busy touching here, there and everywhere of the car's interior and admiring it.

"...You think so?" (Sae-Jin)

"Yes. You made a good choice. Isn't this model from a famous brand?" (Hazeline)

He smiled without saying anything. Not only was the brand very famous, this particular model had such a low production volume, it was very hard to buy one... but he didn't feel the need to say this out aloud.

– *Knight Jin Seh-Hahn has ascended to low Mid Tier...*

When Hazeline's curious fingers touched the stereo, the news about Jin Seh Hahn leaked out, causing Kim Sae-Jin to quickly switch it off.

"We are hearing a lot of that guy's news nowadays." (Hazeline)

"Seems like it. By the way, there is something that makes me curious whenever I am with Miss Hazeline..." (Sae-Jin)

He glanced at the perfect side profile of her face and carefully changed the subject.

"Mm? What is it?" (Hazeline)

"Ah, the thing is..."

"But Mister Kim Sae-Jin, are you really in a position to be curious about other women? I thought you're no different from a married man now?" (Hazeline)

"..."

Hazeline replied while smiling. So Sae-Jin let out a fake cough and concentrated on driving instead.

As an aside, the matter of him living together with/dating Yu Sae-Jung was widely known by every member of the Guild by now. According to Yi Hye-Rin's testimony, Yu Sae-Jung said it herself in a 'slip of a tongue' type of incident.

"Hahat, I was just kidding. It's a joke. Well, in any case... I'm quite close to Sae-Jung, so I guess it's fine. What are you curious about? You can ask me anything. After all, Sae-Jin is my benefactor and all." (Hazeline)

At those words, Sae-Jin glanced at her once more.

"Well, Miss Hazeline. You are... a Dark Elf, yes?" (Sae-Jin)

"Yes, that's correct." (Hazeline)

"But..." (Sae-Jin)

“...Ah.” (Hazeline)

Before he could finish saying what was on his mind, she began nodding her head slowly as if she figured it out.

“My skin. You are curious about that, yes?” (Hazeline)

“...Yes.”

There were three types of Elves out there – regular Elves, High Elves, and Dark Elves.

Here, the regular Elves referred to those beautiful beings known in the mass media for possessing flawless milky skin, gorgeous facial features, as well as smooth and supple limbs.

Next was the High Elves. Also sometimes referred to as ‘Noble’ Elves, they possessed rich and pure bloodlines and commanded admiration and respect from other Elves.

Finally, Dark Elves. Not only they preferred darker places, their skin tone was also darker than other Elves, so they were called Dark Elves.

“Mmmm...” (Hazeline)

Seeing Hazeline’s creased brows as if this question was greatly troubling her, Sae-Jin ended up swallowing down his saliva. Maybe it was because of curiosity, the words *You don’t have to tell me if it’s too troublesome* circled around in his mouth before disappearing completely.

“...Do you wish to know?” (Hazeline)

“Oh, that... well.” (Sae-Jin)

He deliberately hesitated. Hazeline deeply stared at him before a slight grin broke out on her lips.

“Since the Goblin Alchemist says he’s curious... It’s actually simple, really. I brewed a certain potion, you see.” (Hazeline)

“Pardon?” (Sae-Jin)

“You know, a potion. A potion. A potion that whitens the skin. I almost died after drinking that thing but still, I ended up with this pale skin.” (Hazeline)

Her words were difficult to understand, but on the flip side, he could accept some part of her explanation. After all, she didn’t question him too much and believed him when he spewed out that nonsense about concocting a potion to grow taller and stuff back then.

“But why did you create a potion like that? Surely, Miss Hazeline would have been plenty beautiful with a darker skin tone...” (Hazeline)

“Mister Kim Sae-Jin, you seem curious about a lot of things today.” (Hazeline)

Sae-Jin tried to inquire a little bit further but Hazeline cut him off with a smile. He stopped asking there after detecting a clear message of warning in the tone of her voice.

The topic of conversation then changed back to their daily lives; did he and Yu Sae-Jung move house, no they didn’t; how much did they earn, that was a secret. As their chatting continued, before long they arrived in front of Hazeline’s house. While inwardly praising its capability that matched its million dollar price tag, Sae-Jin parked the car.

“Take care.” (Sae-Jin)

“I will. Thank you for your help again. Ah, right. You still remember that we are meeting again in two weeks time, yes? We need to negotiate with the overseas contact, the one suggested by you. Looks like we’ll have to fly over to the USA.” (Hazeline)

“...Huh?”

At this unexpected revelation, Sae-Jin went blank-faced as he tilted his head.

“What’s the matter?” (Hazeline)

“You mean, I, I need to fly over there on a plane?”

“Of course. A proxy officially appointed by the Alchemist must be present during the talks – I thought I told you this already?” (Hazeline)

“But, that...”

Watching Sae-Jin breaking out in panic, a thick smile began to infuse on Hazeline’s lips.

“Well, it shouldn’t be a problem, yes? Mister Sae-Jin can afford a lot of time nowadays, too. Three days and two nights should be more than enough, I think.” (Hazeline)

“But you know of my...” (Sae-Jin)

“Yes, I remember. But I know Mister Sae-Jin’s secrets already, so it’s fine. I’ll personally call and tell Sae-Jung after I finish up work tomorrow.” (Hazeline)



Ttak!

Yu Sae-Jung angrily slammed the spoon down on the table. There were many emotions showing up on her face; anger, dismay, fear, worries, etc, etc.

“But do you think that even makes sense?” (Yu Sae-Jung)

Her voice was as cold as permafrost.

“...But it’s work, though.” (Sae-Jin)

“Even then!! No wait. If that’s the case, then I’ll go with you!” (Yu Sae-Jung)

“I wish that’s possible, but right now, you got your mobilisation orders, don’t you?” (Sae-Jin)

Not only the Dawn Knights Order, but everyone else except Eden, received the mobilisation orders because of the ongoing Monster incidents; not only were they tasked with eradicating the Monsters, but they had to go out on patrol and currently, Knights couldn’t even sleep for more than three hours a day as a result.

“Ah, ah... But why? Does Oppa have to go? Is it a problem for Unni to go alone?” (Yu Sae-Jung)

“That’s how important this deal is. Besides, I’ll be accompanied by Mister Sun-Ho and a few other Mercenaries, so you don’t have to worry about me.” (Sae-Jin)

“...Dang it.” (Yu Sae-Jung)

To think the son of Kim Yu-Sohn, Kim Sun-Ho was going too... She carried a big pout while roughly fidgeting around with the poor spoon. She had lots of things she'd like to say. Really lots. But she couldn't voice any of them in fear of being seen as a narrow-minded woman.

“Hmm...” (Sae-Jin)

Sae-Jin quietly looked at her for a while, before reaching out and smoothly held her hand.

“I'll be back soon. In fact, I'll hurry it up. Since I'll end up missing you way too much, you know.” (Sae-Jin)

He spoke with a smooth baritone voice while a gentle smile hung on his lips.

Yu Sae-Jung met his eyes and then, let out a long sigh. It was a fact that the person who loved more would feel more anxiety as well. And she had already decided to persevere through it all anyways.

“...You'll call everyday?” (Yu Sae-Jung)

“Of course.”

“...Always with slick answers... I wonder if a flying Monster will show up or something.” (Yu Sae-Jung)



A late evening, the day before Sae-Jin's departure.

He had to make his way towards the Mercenary Company offices after Kim Yu-Sohn urgently called for him. And before Sae-Jin could say words of concern regarding the veteran Mercenary's pale complexion, Kim Yu-Sohn hurriedly brought up the reason for this unplanned meeting.

“I had another dream, sir. However, in this one... I believe that we need to alert the world right away.” (Kim Yu-Sohn)

“...Excuse me?” (Sae-Jin)

“The future world I saw in my dream was not prepared at all, sir. It was no different from a living hell. That is why, we need to raise the alertness of the world at a bare minimum.” (Kim Yu-Sohn)

Sae-Jin became flustered slightly by the sight of Kim Yu-Sohn who was seemingly a lot more urgent compared to when they conversed over the magic communication crystal.

“Ah... That... There are a lot of questions I’d like to ask, but first, will anyone believe it even if it’s us saying it?” (Sae-Jin)

It was a reasonable question. When one tried to predict the advent of a huge event, there was a danger of being branded as a crazy man suffering from delusions, or be seen as a conspiracy theorist instead. Even if one used the excuse of a Trait, the result might end up the same.

“Of course, no one would listen seriously at the words of either me or you, the Guild Master. However, don’t we have a certain trump card that can make everyone within South Korea trust in our words?” (Kim Yu-Sohn)

Even Kim Sae-Jin understood right away.

The Mercenary Lycan.

“We should send a letter with the Lycan’s signature to the SID, and then hold a press conference.” (Kim Yu-Sohn)

“Still, even if they believe us, wouldn’t the confusion within the populace be too great? I mean, since the current situation of the Monster incidents are serious, we’ll have to come to a compromise with the government, too...” (Sae-Jin)

This could bring about mass hysteria in the form of panic-buying of supplies, armed robbery and other survival instincts of humans commonly seen during the time of conflict, or even during the quasi-state of war.

“That is just the tip of the iceberg, sir.” (Kim Yu-Sohn)

Within the energy-less eyes of Kim Yu-Sohn, impatience could be spied.

Seeing such urgency from him was a first; Kim Sae-Jin could only nod his head in silence while looking at him.

Even then, Kim Yu-Sohn showed no signs of standing up from his seat, so Sae-Jin pulled out his phone and called Jo Hahn-Sung.

– *“Hello, Master. It’s Jo Hahn-Sung here.”*

Although he was being treated as the real authority of the Guild and received hundreds of “requests” a day, as usual, Jo Hahn-Sung maintained humility when talking to Sae-Jin.

“I’m not sure when it’ll happen, but... No, in two months’ time, the Lycan is going to announce something big, so please have a chat with the relevant government officials. And prepare accordingly as well.” (Sae-Jin)

– *“I beg your pardon?”*

Jo Hahn-Sung wielded considerable power and had become a person who wouldn’t even bat an eyelid when hearing the names of politicians and Chaebols, but then, the weight that name carried still seemed quite considerable.

– *“But how...”*

“Please don’t ask any more than this. And..... right, there is something else. Those idiots from MBS network. When we are holding the press conference, don’t invite them.” (Sae-Jin)

As an aside, MBS was a trashy media outlet that always tried to pick a fault with the activities of Sae-Jin and The Monster Guild. Although this might be seen as a cheap trick, it couldn’t be helped as those bastards weren’t the type of people who’d listen when spoken to nicely.

– *“I already told them we won’t give them any more information whatsoever in the future unless their president comes over here and apologises personally.”* (Jo Hahn-Sung)

“...As expected, you took care of that really well.” (Sae-Jin)

– *“Thank you very much, sir. As for preparations... firstly, for the venue, which place should we choose, sir?”*

Selecting a correct place to hold a press conference was important. Rather than holding it within the grounds of the Guild or the main hall of the Monster Mercenary Company...

“Can we get permission from the Dawn Order?” (Sae-Jin)

Lately, Yu Sae-Jung had been saying this as if she was throwing it out there – that he was neglecting the Dawn and was getting too friendly with the Raven instead. If she was saying this much, then her father and grandfather must’ve had displayed their dissatisfaction since from a while ago.

– *“Yes, sir. It shouldn’t be an issue. In fact, I believe they might welcome us.”*

With this conference being held within the Dawn’s premises, Sae-Jin would be able to show to the rest of the country that their relationship was still tight as ever.

“Then, let’s go with that.” (Sae-Jin)

When Kim Sae-Jin decided and ended the call, Kim Yu-Sohn let out a relieved sigh with an equally relieved expression.

CHAPTER 102

THE RIGHT START (3)

It was an early Summer morning, but the temperature was already very high. Hazeline was waiting for Kim Sae-Jin's arrival in the Incheon International Airport.

"...Hey, isn't she an Elf?" (A passerby 1)

"Look at her pale skin. I think you might be right." (A passerby 2)

"Should we go and ask her?" (A passerby 1)

It was fine for her to wait, since she was the one who showed up earlier than scheduled, but still, Hazeline found it hard to endure those pointed stares of curiosity and envy thrown at her way thanks to the thick robe she happened to wear at the moment. Hell, one or two thoughtless morons lowered their line of sight and tried to take a peek at her face without holding back, even... Just like now, with these two buffoons.

Hazeline wanted so bad to shower these clueless idiots and their ugly mugs with a deadly magic spell, but held herself back by relying on some superhuman endurance.

'...My temper has gone softer by a lot, huh.' (Hazeline)

If it was in the past, she'd have caused an incident by now. While feeling amazed by her own mellowing personality, Hazeline pulled out her phone.

– I'll be arriving there shortly. I meant to arrive there earlier, but several Paparazzi got stuck on me.

She was about to call Sae-Jin to find out where he was, only to see a text message from him sitting unopened in her phone. Hazeline typed a reply *No need to rush* without thinking too much and sent it, then began browsing the web.

To appease her boredom, she began messing around various portal sites, and before long, curiosity overtook her so she typed the words 'Kim Sae-Jin' in the search engine.

– Kim Sae-Jin.

188 CM.

One of the most-talked about persons.

The profile pic shown was of a rather cool-looking man; and the information about him popping up on the search results were good enough to slap the faces of most middle-of-the-road celebrities. There were lots of photos of him walking by the pavement, totally unaware; stories of his daily activities; and his act of kindness that no one knew about until now... he even donated close to \$1 million to the orphanage he grew up in.

“Miss Hazeline!!”

As she was deeply immersed in the depths of Internet, she heard a voice calling out from somewhere and so, she slightly lifted her head to look.

“Ah, my apologies. The thing is... those Paparazzi.” (Sae-Jin)

A tall, leggy man wearing a pair of sunglasses was walking straight towards her direction.

Although he only wore a simple white T-shirt and a pair of blue jeans, his tall height and the perfect body shape brought those clothes to life, while his voice that sounded sexy no matter where it was heard caused all the attention to focus on him.

Hazeline dazedly stared at the deep smile drawn on the lips visible below the sunglasses, the kind that celebrities liked to wear, before waking up suddenly and glared at the man in a somewhat unhappy manner.

“It’s fine. I only waited for twenty minutes, after all.” (Hazeline)

The promised time was ten o’clock, but now, it was twenty past ten. Kim Sae-Jin could only scratch the back of his neck.

“I’m truly sorry. We got held up trying to deal with the paparazzi.” (Kim Sun-Ho)

From behind Sae-Jin, Kim Sun-Ho emerged and began apologising in his stead.

“...I said, it’s fine. Let’s hurry and get going.” (Hazeline)

Feeling awkward now, Hazeline quickly turned around and pulled her carry-on bag, heading towards the boarding gate.



The airplane that used Mana Stones as a fuel source only needed one hour to land on the city of San Francisco’s International Airport. Although the trip took only one hour, thanks to time zone differences, currently it was eight in the evening in California. Still...

[Time left before needing to change: 14:45:94]

Since his Trait operated on the internal clock instead, he had quite a bit of free time. However...

– *Over there!!*

SFX for countless number of camera flashes going off

The crazy explosions of camera lights and the questions from the crowd of reporters went off as soon as Sae-Jin’s traveling party left the airport’s gates, and they were more than enough to make him and his group dizzy for a brief moment.

“What the?!” (Sae-Jin)

“Wha, wha, wha, what...” (Hazeline)

Compared to how Hazeline reacted, one could say Sae-Jin was much more cool-headed. Seeing the throng of welcoming (?) crowd filling up the airport, her legs continued to shake uncontrollably before she dived behind Sae-Jin and hid there.

“Mister Sae-Jin!! D, d, do something!! I, I, I, I can’t, handle, th, this, you know...!!!” (Hazeline)

“Guild Master Sae-Jin!! Please look this way!! This way!” (Unnamed reporter)

“For this potion export deal, the current Vice President Skendahl of the USA made an unprecedented move and sent the words of his appreciation to the Korean government and has expressed his anticipation. What are your thoughts on...” (Unnamed reporter 2)

Hazeline looked like she might throw up at any moment now, yet these reporters, speaking in Korean somehow, continued with their ‘rush’. Kim Sae-Jin helped her stand before she collapsed and signaled Kim Sun-Ho with his eyes.

“Please do not worry.” (Kim Sun-Ho)

As soon as the message was received, Sun-Ho and the subordinate Mercenaries bravely stepped forward and created the exit route. As expected of former Knights, they were worth every penny, and both Sae-Jin and Hazeline faced no further troubles as they left the airport.



After that chaos, the traveling party could just barely arrive at the luxury hotel located downtown in Los Angeles. Called ‘Promance’, almost all the floors from the ground all the way up to the penthouse suite, were booked out. And that penthouse suite occupied the entire top floor.

“For now... looks like we’ll have to form a contract with both ‘Rockemend Potions’ and ‘Tryth Potions’, or at least with one of them. They are the biggest suppliers this side, after all.” (Hazeline)

Right now, Hazeline and Kim Sae-Jin were holding a business meeting on the penthouse suite.

“They are both corporations, though?” (Sae-Jin)

“But of course. The way things operate can’t be the same between Korea and the States, you know.” (Hazeline)

The situation of the Alchemy world in the States was rather different compared to that of South Korea.

Within the border of the comparably tiny South Korea, the small to medium Alchemy Houses took over the duty of potion supply. But in the far, far bigger US of A, two or three big corporations held exclusive rights to distribute potions in a given State. And since the political and financial muscles of these corporations were indeed powerful, the Alchemists here couldn't maintain their anonymity as much as their counterparts in South Korea.

Put simply, although this set-up was better for the wider market as a whole, it was actually more disadvantageous towards the suppliers – the Alchemists themselves.

“All the proposed terms sound good so far. Minus the distribution fees, 85% of profits will be handed over to us.” (Hazeline)

But Kim Sae-Jin's Guild was seemingly a 'special' exception to this rule.

The truth was, though, it wasn't just Kim Sae-Jin only; the federal government had initiated a new policy of 'looking after' their own Alchemists quite recently. And that was due to the potion drought, obviously.

A steady, near-unchanging peace had been maintained throughout the world for a long time, and that led to the lessening of the dangers inherent in Monster hunts. That, in turn, led to a decline in the demand and supply of potions. But now, with the sudden explosion of chaos caused by Monsters happening all over the globe, the demand had gone through the roof literally overnight...

But only the South Korea was able to escape this flow of events happening in the world, as its potion supply had been quite healthy for a while thanks to a certain 'genius' Alchemist's efforts – the Goblin.

“...Well, in that case... Let's meet them first and then decide.” (Sae-Jin)

If it was any other businessman, he would have to carefully assess the terms offered and the people offering them, but fortunately, Sae-Jin possessed a certain trump card that allowed him to decipher the true intentions of any person he met.

Of course, no truly successful businessmen worth their salt would be completely 'innocent', as it were. But still, it would be a big help if he could pick the lesser of the evils available out there.

“Yes, let's do that. For now, it's getting late already, so get some rest for tomorrow.”

(Hazeline)

Hazeline unhurriedly gathered the scattered documents and then got up, heading towards the adjoining room to the right side.

As an aside, thanks to Kim Sae-Jin's Trait, it was decided that the penthouse suite would be shared between him, Kim Sun-Ho and Hazeline – but it was Hazeline who ended up with the best room there.

“Then, let's end here for today.” (Sae-Jin)

As soon as Kim Sun-Ho nodded his head, Sae-Jin changed into a wolf.

However, even at this sudden transformation, Sun-Ho's expression didn't change.



The following day.

Kim Sae-Jin and Hazeline went and met the representatives from the two aforementioned corporations in turn. Both of them offered the very best terms they could afford, in order to not miss out on this chance to break through the current potion drought; and disregarding a few minor details meant to keep in check the rival influences, both contracts seemed quite profitable for Kim Sae-Jin.

Also, after the two meetings concluded, these corporations even did something wholly unnecessary and roped in a high-ranking government official from the current federal administration to stop by at the hotel and greet Sae-Jin and company, asking if there was anything he could do.

“We've already concluded talks with the Korean government. With this deal in place, the partnership between the Korean government and our side will strengthen even further.” (Unnamed government official)

“...Is that so?” (Sae-Jin)

In all honesty, Sae-Jin found it a bit burdensome by the fact that a measly little potion export deal could change the future direction of a country, but the official, the Vice Minister from the Monster Affairs Ministry, continuously emphasized this point in order to inflate the importance of this deal.

“Of course. After all, you have chosen the United States of America ahead of everyone else – soon, I believe Mister President will hold a press conference and directly announce the deal to the public.” (Unnamed government official)

“Keum. Right, by the way, I see that your Korean is really fluent.” (Sae-Jin)

But, feeling his face getting hotter, Sae-Jin just had to change the topic. Honestly, it was rather mystifying to see a well-dressed white man speak so fluently in Korean.

“It’s only a par for the course. Because of the current outbreak of all these Monster-related incidents across the world, the core interest of us at the Monster Affairs Ministry is centered around on Alchemy and weapons. Whether it’s Alchemy or weapons – especially in Alchemy – there are a lot of disadvantages if one does not understand Korean.” (Unnamed government official)

“...That’s how it is?” (Sae-Jin)

This was probably because the website called Alchemy Page that Sae-Jin and Hazeline had co-founded, as well as various recipes and thesis written about ingredients they had began revealing publically since a while ago.

“Yes. By relying on others to translate and explain the new information appearing in real time on Alchemy Page, isn’t it the same thing as voluntarily falling behind everyone else?” (Unnamed official)

On Alchemy Page, an ‘Alchemist-exclusive space provided by The Monster’, the Goblin Alchemist had revealed accurate information on medicinal ingredients that not many knew about, as well as recipes for painlessly concocting low to mid grade potions. Higher grade potion recipes were withheld, though, since they were trade secrets, after all.

Thanks to this, the internet-loving Alchemists migrated en masse away from the Alchemy Cafe website and found a new home in The Monster’s Alchemy Page. Unlike the Alchemy Cafe which was full of gossip and back talk, the new site was filled with academic discussions regarding the art and science behind Alchemy, thus drawing in and educating many Alchemists in the process.

And now, just like what this government official was saying, many Alchemists were utilising this website not to fall behind the others. And the site had soon evolved into a world-famous academic forum where many visitors were learning the Korean

language in order to make a better use of the valuable info available there.

As an aside, for some weird reason, Hazeline hated the Alchemy Cafe, so whenever she took a look at its near-instant decline into oblivion, compared to her own Alchemy Page that was growing in popularity every day, she had this content grin etched on her face.

“In that case, have you decided on the contract yet?” (Unnamed government official)

“We are still deliberating on the matter.” (Hazeline)

Hazeline replied in his stead.

“By the way, both of them were trying to play some kind of trivial tricks with us, you see.” (Hazeline)

“.....”

Seeing the official’s expression darken, Sae-Jin added his words right away.

“But since we came all the way to the States, we do plan to make this contract happen.” (Sae-Jin)

“Ah, ahahaha. That’s a relief to hear.” (Unnamed government official)

Sae-Jin also broke out in a short laughter after witnessing the colour return to the official’s face.

“Ah, that’s right. If they try any other strange tricks, please do not hesitate and give me a call. Here’s my card.” (unnamed government official)

Seeing this earnest attitude of caring about Sae-Jin more than his own country’s corporations...

“Of course. We’ll give you a call.” (Sae-Jin)

...Sae-Jin didn’t refuse the man and received the card.

And so, all the meetings concluded by 9 in the evening.

Kim Sae-Jin, Hazeline, Kim Sun-Ho as well as other Mercenaries returned to their quarters, thinking that they might get to enjoy the remainder of their stay in this ultra-upmarket hotel as a paid-for holiday.



AM 00:00 – midnight.

Kim Sae-Jin's eyes snapped open in the middle of the night.

There was a nearly imperceptible tremor and the ominous aura. Even while feeling uncertain, his body must have sensed the approaching dangers, as his claws had extended out already.

He couldn't tell where this feelings of danger was originating from. But the instincts of the Wolf told him there was no time to spare.

He shot out from his own room and headed straight for Hazeline's.

"...Kkyaahck!!"

As soon as she was woken by the shape of a wolf bursting into her room as if breaking the door down, Hazeline screamed her lungs out.

"W, w, w, what do you think you're doing right now?!"

With one hand, she pulled the blanket tightly while the other hand was getting ready to fire a magic spell. Her voice shook as she asked.

"Get, get out of here, right now!! Kkyack!! M, Mister, Sun-Ho, and what are you doing here, too?"

Before Hazeline's screams could end, even Kim Sun-Ho was rushing into her room as well.

And at the same time...

Kkhoo-goo-goo-goong...

An unsettling vibration shook the entire hotel.

Instinctively, all three present turned their heads to left. They had sensed *something* looking at them.

“ ... ”

“ ... ”

“ ... ”

And there, beyond the wall made of thick plate glass, they saw a pair of terrifyingly huge red eyeballs staring at their direction.

On that grotesquely distorted face, the only things that seemed relatively normal were those two eyes.

It was a Doo-Urk-Shi-Nee. *(TL: Well, this is a sub-type of the Dokkaebi. There is no Western equivalent that I can think of – just think of a Japanese Oni crossed with the Attack on Titan’s giants. And you’re halfway there.)*

“...F*ck!!”

They moved really fast. Changing back to the Human form, Sae-Jin quickly embraced Hazeline and began running to the opposite direction from the huge Monster.

“Cast the magic barrier, now!!” (Sae-Jin)

And then, while shouting at Hazeline held tight in his arms, Sae-Jin ran to the right and broke through another thick plate glass, descending hundreds of metres down to the ground.

CHAPTER 103

THE RIGHT START (4)

Although he fell from the top floor of the hotel located high up, it only took briefest of moments for his airborne feet to touch the solid ground.

Kwaahang!!!

The ground where Kim Sae-Jin landed on caved in to a deep crater, and a powerful shock wave spread around to the surroundings.

“Are you unhurt?” (Sae-Jin)

He looked at Hazeline who had tightly wrapped her arms around his neck. Fortunately, she seemed to have activated the barrier in time, and wasn’t negatively affected by the abrupt descent.

“Yeah. I’m fine thanks to you. However...” (Hazeline)

Indeed, there was a far more pressing matter to focus at that moment. On the road they had just landed on quite noisily, countless small and large Doo-Urk-Shi-Nees were there waiting, as if to surround the duo.

“First time seeing one with my own eyes.” (Sae-Jin)

“Me too.” (Hazeline)

The ‘Doo-Urk-Shi-Nee’. A creature of ‘emptiness’ that made nary a sound nor possessed substance; a creature that could only be seen by the naked eye and by nothing else.

Their individual sizes may have differed from one to the other, but without fail, all of them were glaring at Kim Sae-Jin and Hazeline’s direction with those creepy red eyes. At this rather unsettling sight, Hazeline hugged Sae-Jin tighter without realising it.

“...Keum.”

At this unexpected skinship, Sae-Jin even forgot how severe the current situation was and ended up getting tensed up somewhat. But then...

Kkhoong!

“Are you two alright?” (Kim Sun-Ho)

Belatedly, Mercenaries led by Kim Sun-Ho descended and landed on the ground as well.

Almost at the same time, the gigantic Doo-Urk-Shi-Nee swung its equally huge arm and slammed into the hotel Kim Sae-Jin and company were staying just now.

Khuooong!!!

A huge explosion filled up the world, shaking the eerie stillness and ripping it apart; the streets, formerly bathed with pitch-black darkness became showered in bright lights at the same time.

As if that was the signal, all the small and large Doo-Urk-Shi-Nees occupying every inch of the road began their frenzied activity.

Kim Sae-Jin quickly put Hazeline down on the ground and swung his fist towards a Doo-Urk-Shi-Nee that was right in front of the rushing pack. Although its face was smashed to bits in one hit, a certain unpleasant sensation came washing all over his body from coming in contact with the uniquely-disgusting skin of a Doo-Urk-Shi-Nee as well as from its blackish-red blood.

“Yuck...”

While frowning deeply in disgust, Sae-Jin extracted Mana out of his body and then used the Orc’s Smithing Technique.

Seuseuseuseu-

Mana slowly condensed as if to form a crystal, and soon enough, it took on the shape of a blue sword.

Since Sae-Jin’s Proficiency Level for ‘Mana Body’ was still on the low, the sword’s strength and overall hardness was somewhat imperfect, but as he had used Mana as

the base ingredient, its sharpness would still be top notch.

Sshya-aack...

He struck out a sword aura and it bisected a Doo-Urk-Shi-Nee cleanly in half.

Unfortunately, this created-from-Mana weapon he wielded couldn't last long. When he cut five or six Monsters down, the sword dissipated away like a cloud of dust. Whenever that happened, though, Sae-Jin created a weapon that could last a bit longer than before and continued to slay countless Doo-Urk-Shi-Nees.

The afterimage left behind in the wake of a sword swing was then pierced straight through by a lengthy spear, and the smooth sword aura drawn from a longsword undulated like a snake, effortlessly slicing apart limbs and bodies of the Monsters coming in contact with it.

A longsword, a podao, a long sabre, a rapier, a main-gauche, a claymore, a spear, etc, etc... All these disparate weapon types found themselves in the hands of a weapons expert and were utilised like true treasures.

"But how..." (Hazeline)

Hazeline dazedly stared at Sae-Jin's battle as he fought relying solely on his senses while swapping his weapons out every ten seconds, before she finally woke up and began reciting the chants for a magic spell.

Her target was the gigantic Doo-Urk-Shi-Nee that was currently searching for a certain someone without making a single noise.



Although a totally unexpected hell had broken out, Kim Sae-Jin and his party could safely survive the ensuing chaos. That was because, in less than five minutes, a state-wide mobilization order had been issued by the Californian State Governor.

Exactly 15 minutes after the hotel collapsed, army tanks and seemingly thousands of Knights and Hunters poured in, completely sweeping away every single Doo-Urk-Shi-Nees present.

After the incident came to an end, that same Vice Minister from earlier arrived in

haste, and began explaining the reason for this unprecedented swiftness of the response – that it was because the US government didn't want to see the export deal going down the proverbial drain. He even made a desperate face as he implored Sae-Jin to not think too badly of them because of this incident.

“...Whoo-ah.” (Sae-Jin)

And so, Sae-Jin and his group could catch their breath while being protected by the Knights. After hearing the rumours about them, all the Knights present here were deeply fearful of this potion deal going down the drain, so they were constantly worrying about Sae-Jin and company being ‘comfortable’ and stuff.

“I was panicking then... what a relief that Mister Sae-Jin was there. Also, for the first time in my life, I'm now a top VIP, too... I'm more used to being chased around, you know.” (Hazeline)

There was no energy in Hazeline's voice.

“Are you hurt anywhere?” (Sae-Jin)

“Maybe because I've exhausted my Mana... I'm kinda feeling dizzy and sleepy.” (Hazeline)

She spoke up to here and slowly leaned her head against Sae-Jin's shoulder. Of course, her fragrant scent drifted into his nose and lightly tickled the senses. Most other women would get really alarmed and call Hazeline's actions crafty like a fox, but as a guy, Sae-Jin simply couldn't push her away – so, all he could do was to let out a fake cough just once.

“Keum... Is that so?” (Sae-Jin)

“Yeah. By the way, Mister Sae-Jin? You were somewhat cool back there. Since when did you become so proficient in handling weapons like that?” (Hazeline)

Recalling once more the sight of the overwhelming martial prowess he displayed, Hazeline asked, her face glowing warmly. Molding Mana into various weapons such as swords, greatswords, spears – anyone would be deeply impressed by the coolness of him defeating all his enemies regardless of what the weapon was in his hand.

“Hahaha...”

Kim Sae-Jin simply broke out in laughter. Hazeline looked at him as if she found his demeanor rather interesting, but then, her expressions hardened.

“However... just who summoned all those Doo-Urk-Shi-Nees here?” (Hazeline)

A Doo-Urk-Shi-Nee was not a normal type of a Monster. Special existences found in the gap between ‘the Rift’ and ‘the material world’, they could only be called forth with a summoning ceremony or a witchcraft of some kind, and more importantly, they would follow the command of the one who summoned them to the letter.

In other words, to see a swarm of Doo-Urk-Shi-Nees suddenly attack the hotel Sae-Jin was staying in, there was really no need to ponder too deeply what their purpose was.

“...”

Sae-Jin could think of ‘someone’ who might be behind this incident. However, he didn’t feel like saying the truth out aloud right now.

“Don’t worry about such things and just get a good rest.”

He gritted his teeth and hardened his expression as well. Hazeline gazed at him for a bit longer, and then, lowered her head back down against his shoulder. While closing her eyes, she was thinking, *His shoulders are so broad...*



The following day.

Leaving the responsibility of finding out the culprits behind the mass summoning of Doo-Urk-Shi-Nees to the American government, Sae-Jin and Hazeline hurried with concluding the deal.

Since they had already received advice from Jo Hahn-Sung, they were able to get the ball rolling faster than expected. Sae-Jin then signed the contract with both corporations at the same time, the distribution of potions in the west of the USA now being handled by them.

To minimise the risk of getting ambushed once more, as soon as the deal was signed, Sae-Jin and his group rushed back to South Korea. And now, he was driving Hazeline back home towards the Gangwon Province.

“My first impression of Mister Sae-Jin was... only about so-so.” (Hazeline)

“...Just so-so?!” (Sae-Jin)

“Yep. You know this too, don’t you? That Elves have high standards. It’s the same story for Dark Elves, too.” (Hazeline)

Kim Sae-Jin and Hazeline – she was perhaps one person Sae-Jin had known the longest. While driving, they chatted about this and that in a friendly atmosphere, as for the past two years there was unexpectedly a lot of memories they had shared.

The day they first met; when Sae-Jin revealed his identity to her; when she mistook him as the inheritor of Rodes’s legacy; when those Vampires suddenly ambushed them, etc, etc...

“Ah, that’s right. Mister Sae-Jin, you said you were curious, right? The reason for my skin being this colour.” (Hazeline)

“...Mm? Oh, I was curious back then, but if it’s not a comfortable subject, you don’t have to say anything.” (Sae-Jin)

At her sudden change of topic, Sae-Jin took a quick glance towards the passenger seat, but when their eyes met, he quickly averted his gaze.

“Even still. I felt that it’s unfair to you, somehow. I mean, you’ve told me everything about your secrets, yet... Honestly, we even went through two life-or-death situations together. But more importantly, I wish to tell you the truth.” (Hazeline)

“...Ha, haha... Umm, really?”

As an aside, he still hadn’t told her the true reason behind the Vampires ambushing them. Still unaware of the truth, she carried a gentle smile on her lips as she slowly continued with her words.

“Well, there is this old saying. That Elves are pure and noble and so, can only fall in love with one person... Many humans think it’s nothing but a lie, but actually, it’s real.”

For Elves, the meaning of ‘love’ was incomparably deep. Whether it was Dark Elves, High Elves, or regular Elves, it was the same.

“But did you know that saying has been romantically repackaged a great deal? The reality is very different.” (Hazeline)

“Different?” (Sae-Jin)

“Yes. For an Elf, ‘love’ is the same thing as obsession and persistence all rolled into one. Doesn’t matter what the situations and the conditions of the target of love are like, if an Elf falls in love, then that Elf will not hesitate doing everything in order be loved back. The reality of the species, who are known to possess the perfect appearance and mindset, is that we’re simply the collection of imperfections.” (Hazeline)

As she spoke, her voice contained a certain feeling of utter, desolate emptiness.

“And so, I... used to love someone. And that person liked women with lighter skin, so I lightened my own. And when I learned that he liked another woman who was gentle and loyal, I even dropped everything I was doing as a Wizard.” (Hazeline)

Panicking at her sudden, impromptu confession of the past, Sae-Jin slowed the car’s speed slightly. Meanwhile, Hazeline grandly sighed out and continued.

“However, that person didn’t love me back. Until the end, he only had that woman in his mind, and then, died trying to protect that very woman. Back then, I’ve never felt sadness stronger than that before. If I didn’t blame someone, I thought I might end up killing myself. So... I did something really deplorable.” (Hazeline)

Kim Sae-Jin quietly observed her.

“That is why... Mister Sae-Jin, you should be wary of Elves. You shouldn’t treat us too nicely, and you must keep a safe distance away from us. Elves just don’t have the strength to distance themselves from a person they find interesting. Of course, there is a big gap between ‘interest’ and ‘love’, but still.” (Hazeline)

The moment her words ended, the car came to a stop. They were in front of her house. As if she found her confession embarrassing, she lightly slapped her cheeks and undid the seat belt buckle.

“Well then, I’ll get going now~. Mister Sae-Jin, thank you for always~.”

“Ah, hang on a sec.” (Sae-Jin)

Sae-Jin quickly stopped her just before she could rush out of the car. He carefully studied her darkened expression, and then extracted a smallish box from his pocket.

“Please take this with you. It’s a present.”

While roaming around the city of Los Angeles, there was this one thing that seemed to have drawn her interest. As she was busy with meetings and thus unable to personally buy it, Sae-Jin had bought it behind her back after he caught her gaze with his acute intuition of the Wolf.

“This is...” (Hazeline)

She dazedly looked at the gift in her hand.

“Well, isn’t that the thing that makes sound when you open it? I thought you were interested in it.” (Sae-Jin)

The ‘thing’ she was looking at with complicated emotions two days ago – a music box.

“Ah...”

“I should get going. Take care of yourself.” (Sae-Jin)

Leaving behind those words, Sae-Jin drove off.

“Honestly. Didn’t he hear my advice...” (Hazeline)

Watching the car moving further away, Hazeline muttered without much strength.



The exporting potions not only helped to increase the fame of Kim Sae-Jin and his Guild, it also had the effect of two countries solidifying their relationship. The US President held a conference to personally announce the deal, and Kim Sae-Jin had been invited to the Blue House, even...

Whatever the case may have been, when he returned home, he also returned to his daily routine. Sometimes as Jin Seh-Hahn, sometimes as Kim Sae-Jin, sometimes as a Monster.

In the meantime, Jin Seh-Hahn's rank had increased to Mid Tier after only two months of activity as the 'Special Employee from Eden', and it seemed that he could hit his goal of upper Mid Tier before the end of that self-imposed six months deadline.

However, as the time continuously flowed forward, the ominous atmosphere for the world became worse and worse.

The frequency of Monster incidents soared higher and higher, and hundreds of people lost their lives every day. Although the loss wasn't as serious in South Korea where the foundation of potion and weapons supply was well established, in places such as Africa, South America, Southeast Asia, etc, etc... The situation had deteriorated so bad in several Third World nations that there was no more point in governance anymore.

"I got called into action eight times in one single day, even... it was really difficult, you know?" (Yu Sae-Jung)

And now – a morning in the middle of September, the time when Summer was slowly coming to its inevitable end. Kim Sae-Jin yawned inwardly as he listened to Yu Sae-Jung's complaints.

"If that's the case, take today and tomorrow off." (Sae-Jin)

"It's not as simple as that... Dad won't give me a time off." (Yu Sae-Jung)

"I'll speak to him." (Sae-Jin)

"Really? That might work~." (Yu Sae-Jung)

Kim Sae-Jin's influence had become such that he could let one Knight miss the mobilization order without too much trouble. Yu Sae-Jung energetically dived into his arms.

Ttiriinnng-

Suddenly, the mobile phone went off. Both Yu Sae-Jung and Kim Sae-Jin's eyes focused on its direction. He moved slightly faster than her, reaching out and snatching the phone away.

"Who is it?" Asked Yu Sae-Jung.

“Oh, it’s nothing.” (Sae-Jin)

Making a half-hearted excuse, he sent his reply, and then placed the phone down.

On the LCD of the phone facing downwards...

The name ‘Hazeline’ was showing on it.

CHAPTER 104

ALL TANGLED UP (1)

Dark Elves hated light. No one knew the exact reason why; everyone simply accepted it as a fact, and in all honesty, the reality was also like that as well. So, most of the homes belonging to Dark Elves were painted in achromatic colours or in black/grey. Heck, quite a few of those houses didn't have any lighting fixtures, even.

“.....”

Inside a dark room truly fitting for a Dark Elf, Hazeline was lying on the bed, gazing deeply into the boxy LCD screen exuding a lone light that brightened this forlorn space.

The contents on the screen that drew her interest was thus:

—

Kim Sae-Jin (Verified Account)

@SJKIM

Guild Master, The Monster/The Orc Blacksmith/High Tier Hunter

Followers 45,345,874 Currently Following 10

—

Probably the most famous person among the younger generation, Kim Sae-Jin. The number of followers were well over 45 million, highest in Asia. In other words, as many as half the population of the entire Korean nation. No wonder, what with this much interest shown by the general public, every once in a while photos and posts uploaded to his social media profile would become topics of news.

“...Why are there so many pics of him with women in here?”

Hazeline pouted visibly as she carefully studied each and every photo appearing on

his profile. There were a ton of selfies uploaded to it, but almost half of them were taken with different women.

Of course, the frequency of those pics being uploaded drastically decreased ever since he began dating Yu Sae-Jung, but still... There were literally endless posts and reposts made by several women who were shamelessly wagging their tails. And many of these ladies had social status that even made Hazeline seem a bit plain in comparison.

Hey, wait a minute. Even I, as an Elf, recognise that person?!

“...Ah-oo. I must be going crazy.”

Hazeline finally woke up from her unnecessarily fevered participation of the social media movement, and flung away her phone to a corner of the bed.

Although she found herself pathetic and hopeless for doing *this* against a man who already had a girlfriend... but somehow, things had become like this lately.

Of course, she did think about that man every now and then. He was eloquent, was a gentleman and had good manners. Initially, her thoughts of him wasn't on the level of a deep, deep interest – but rather, something more common, something like *He's a nice guy~*, that kind of admiration.

However, as their interaction over the matters related with potions increased in frequency, the depths of her feelings began growing deeper as if she was getting seduced by his innate scent; the real decisive blow came in the forms of two unexpected battles and one heartfelt gift.

And so, nowadays, whenever she was left alone at home and feeling a bit sentimental, her head would be filled with Sae-Jin's face.

But this was definitely not love. For an Elf, the meaning of love was far more graver than dying itself, and so when an Elf fell in love, one couldn't carry on with his or her daily life anymore. Hazeline knew that she was still very far from that. Very.

However, at the same time, she recognised her condition as a very bad omen as well. On top of that, the 'situation' was even worse than the last time. After all, he already had a lover...

“Fuu.”

Hazeline let out a long sigh, her eyes instinctively moving back towards her phone.

It would have been nice if her feelings remained where she might think about him whenever she felt lonely... but such a thing was not possible for an Elf.

In the end, she blamed her complicated emotions as the result of her species-unique instincts, and picked the phone back up.

“...Just when is he going to send back a reply... Ah, maybe?”

There was no reply whatsoever until now for a text message she sent to him over two hours ago. But rather than getting annoyed, worries filled her up first.

“What, are, you, doing, now? You, still, haven’t, replied, yet... Maybe, is, there, something, wrong...”

She read each word carefully before sending the message. She then slowly lowered the phone down and her gaze drifted towards the top of the desk. A charming little music box, shaped like a piano, was calling out for her attention.

“...”

She wordlessly approached the music box and touched it. Accompanying the gentle, soothing music note, a faint scent of a certain someone drifted along in the air.



The date was 9th of September, the opening day for the seminar held by the World Monster Organization, also known as WMO.

This time, it was being held in Seoul, South Korea. The biggest reason for this was due to the appearance and propagation of the Hero Orcs – or Korean Orcs, as they were referred to as, whose origins still remained a mystery.

“There are four ranks within the Hero Orcs: The Orc Warrior, the Orc Jaguar, the Orc Senior, and the Orc Chieftain.” (Kim Yu-Rin)

Kim Yu-Rin was attending this seminar. Since she was the only human being who could enter the village of the Hero Orcs, she was invited to speak as the sole authority on all things Hero Orc.

“Rather strangely, there is no rank of ‘Great Warrior’ with the Hero Orcs. That’s largely due to them not having the hierarchy-based division of ranks, although they do show admiration and respect towards the older generation.” (Kim Yu-Rin)

Her role here was to convey the information on Hero Orcs to these professors and scholars who came from all across the globe.

“That is why, I propose using the term ‘Senior’ in lieu of ‘Great Warrior’ to denote that admiration and respect shown by the Orcs.”

From everything she had observed so far, Hero Orcs possessed far greater intelligence and wisdom compared to regular Orcs. They were able to make a basic reasoning and even knew how to be considerate towards others as well.

All these interesting information definitely showed the difference between them and other types of Monsters, so all the scholars here zealously took memos while nodding their heads nonstop.

“How can you tell the ranks apart?” (Unnamed scholar)

A middle-aged white man asked in fluent Korean.

“That’s a good question. Like other normal Orcs, you can tell fully grown adults apart from juveniles by their body sizes, and for the adults, you can use their epidermis as the yardstick. The bluer it is, higher the rank it has.” (Kim Yu-Rin)

“In that case, can we still estimate one’s age with its hair?” (Another unnamed scholar)

“Yes. There’s no change to that fact.” (Kim Yu-Rin)

“What is the current estimated size of the village?” (Yet another unnamed scholar)

“There are around 1000 individuals living there, and about half of that number are fully grown adults.” (Kim Yu-Rin)

As expected from a bunch of scientists, the attendees continuously threw lots of questions laced with significant amount of curiosity. That resulted in Kim Yu-Rin’s part in the seminar going on for one extra hour.

“Fuu... Then, shall we end it here? Thank you all for coming.”

And finally.

Kim Yu-Rin quickly escaped the seminar hall while being showered with applause and headed to the car park; and as soon as she set off, she headed straight towards the Monster field.

“I’m gonna be so, so late.”

Today was the scheduled day for the sparring with the Orc. There was a grin on her face without her even realising it.



“You’ve become stronger.”

An afternoon with harsh sunlight pouring down.

While wiping away the streaming sweat, Kim Yu-Rin said to the Hero Orc.

Lately, all their sparring sessions ended in a draw. In the beginning, she won most of the encounters, but the Orc continued to grow stronger the wilder each sparring became. Of course, she too grew stronger as well while sparring with ‘him’, so a disaster such as losing had been prevented so far.

“ ... ”

Wordlessly, the Orc sat down and leaned against a huge tree trunk. Judging by how he was breathing angrily through his nose, one could tell that he was unhappy with the spar ending in yet another draw.

“Even this much is still quite amazing, really. Although I look like this, I’m the world’s 50th strongest Knight, I’ll have you know.” (Kim Yu-Rin)

Her skills that were getting better by sparring with the Orc – she was able to achieve this career-high world-wide Knight ranking as a result. While advertising her own strength, Kim Yu-Rin sat down next to him.

“ ... ”

She silently studied the Orc’s mood. Thankfully, the Orc didn’t show any signs of

avoiding her.

“Thanks to you, I’m also getting stronger.” (Kim Yu-Rin)

Speaking like so, Kim Yu-Rin carefully placed her head on his shoulder. When she took a quick glance, the Orc didn’t even seem to think about her at all. She began enjoying the perfect combination of a gently blowing breeze and a wide, dependable shoulder.

“Oi.”

Suddenly, the Orc opened his mouth. Kim Yu-Rin’s body shook for a brief moment, wondering if she should take her head away... but then, decided play dumb.

“We stop doing this, from now.” (Sae-Jin the Orc)

“...Excuse me?” (Kim Yu-Rin)

But then, what he said next made her unable to sit still, and so, out of utter shock, she quickly detached her head from his shoulder. The Orc stared right at her and slowly continued on with his words.

“Don’t come here anymore.” (Sae-Jin the Orc)

Although the Orc’s facial expression was cold and indifferent, Kim Sae-Jin actually was doing this for her sake.

‘The hit list.’

Not too long ago, the Linked-up Vampire Apostle brought along a new piece of information.

Vampires had compiled a list of individuals who could get in the way of achieving their goals, and that kill list had entered the hands of the Vampire Lord.

Apparently, Kim Sae-Jin’s name was rightfully occupying the top position on that list. Without a doubt, the recent episode with the Doo-Urk-Shi-Nees happened because of the list.

And Kim Yu-Rin occupied the second spot.

Unfortunately, it was too damn easy to predict Yu-Rin's current routine. Meaning, it would be so much easier to ambush her. After all, she'd willingly show up at the Orc village all by herself twice a week.

"But, but why so suddenly?!" (Kim Yu-Rin)

Her eyes were trembling hard. She looked utterly devastated, but the Orc remained cold.

"But, but? But why, for what..." (Kim Yu-Rin)

"I'm bored of you." (Sae-Jin)

He was unable to say the kind of excuse she might have accepted easily, only warning her off without offering a proper explanation.

"This, the last time you enter. Next time you want to enter village, be ready to kill, or be killed. I already tell other Orcs." (Sae-Jin the Orc)

"What! What the heck is that?! You should tell me the reason first, so I..." (Kim Yu-Rin)

She desperately ran up to him, unable to comprehend at all.

However, the Orc simply grasped the mace with his hand and swung it towards her.

"Ah-euck! Wait! Stop fighting and let's talk, talk...!!" (Kim Yu-Rin)

She backed off quickly enough, but she couldn't prevent her body from taking some damage from the sudden attack.

She didn't give up, though, and continued to demand explanation from him, but the Orc stuck to answering with violence. As the seconds ticked by, even the other Hero Orcs began casting hostile gazes towards her direction.

"You, you bastard!!"

And so, all she could say was this one curse word before beating a hasty retreat.

Kim Sae-Jin the Orc's eyes stayed with the departing back of her. The blood seeping out from the wounds he had inflicted on her fell like teardrops, leaving deep trails

behind.



“Why are there so many applicants?” (Sae-Jin)

A call from Jo Hahn-Sung was waiting for the heavy-hearted Sae-Jin’s arrival back home.

The subject of the discussion was the qualifications of the potential Griffin riders – to assess each Knight who wished to ride on the back of a Griffin.

– “It looks like almost every upper Mid Tier Knight in the country have applied so far. The view of Griffins being an effective means of policing in the near future has already become widespread, sir. And also, what with the current state of affairs being as is... this and that point seems to have combined into one and so many people have applied as a result, sir.”

As an aside, the number of Griffins managed by The Monster now was thirty, which prompted the establishment of the ‘Griffin Rider Certification’ law. Obviously, the people responsible for awarding the certificate was The Monster Guild.

“Did the Knight Orders give out their permissions? After all, the lease fee will be nothing to laugh about.” (Sae-Jin)

And ‘interested parties’ related to The Monster Guild were suspecting that these Griffins would later become an important source of revenue. It of course had to do with the leasing fee; a callout lasting for half a day would normally require the Knights Orders to cough up somewhere north of \$100,000.

Although Sae-Jin did feel it was still on the side of being too cheap as riding on Griffins was rated as the number one in the most cost-efficient way of traveling by the Time magazine. But any higher than that, it wouldn’t mesh well with the current market conditions.

– “Yes, they sure did, sir. And related to that topic, the Dawn Order requested for the purchasing of a Griffin if it’s possible. They promised to give us a substantial amount if we do.”

When Jo Hahn-Sung said those words, Yu Sae-Jung’s ear perked up while she

pretended to watch the TV on the side.

“Have they prepared a suitable nesting area and trained the staff accordingly?” (Sae-Jin)

Nod, nod.

Even before Jo Hahn-Sung could make his reply, Yu Sae-Jung was busy nodding her head. Kim Sae-Jin chuckled slightly after realising that her influence played a big part in this request being made.

– *“Yes, sir. They seemed to have benchmarked our nesting area and constructed theirs close to our own, so even Raul might be able to adapt easily.”*

By the way, Raul was the name of a female Griffin that Yu Sae-Jung really, really liked.

“In that case... Not sure about selling, but what about a ten-year lease? Tell them we’ll go with that.” (Sae-Jin)

As soon as those words left his mouth, Yu Sae-Jung silently punched the air in celebration and hugged his back tightly.

– *“Yes, sir, I understand.”*

“Alright, then. Please take care of the rest.” (Sae-Jin)

– *“Ah, that’s right. The Foreign Affairs Minister has contacted us as well, sir. There seems to be a big backlog of countries requesting for export of potions and Griffins, starting from the nations of the EU block...”*

“Mister Hahn-Sung, I’m leaving the matter of meeting them to your discretion.”

– *“Sir?!”*

Jo Hahn-Sung dazedly spat out a single word reply. Chuckling to himself, Sae-Jin was about to end the call, only to hear the urgent voice from the other side telling him not to.

“Is there something else?” (Sae-Jin)

– *“Yes sir, there is one more thing. This is the important one.”*

“...What is it?”

Jo Hahn-Sung took in a deep breath.

– *“The date for the Lycan’s press conference has been set.”*

CHAPTER 105

ALL TANGLED UP (2)

After receiving the general summary of the information ahead of time, the Korean government requested a delay of three months for the press conference, till late November, saying that they needed to make their own preparations. They also requested that, in order to minimise mass panic and confusion, the wording and the sentence structures should be softened up a bit.

– *“It seems that Miss Yu Baek-Song and the members of the National Assembly who are friendly with the Dawn have given us a great deal of their considerations, sir. I heard that the administration was going to announce the findings of the Lycan as if they had uncovered it first.”* (Jo Hahn-Sung)

“Is that how it was? Anyhow... I understand. But what a relief this is. I thought they might simply choose to ignore us.” (Sae-Jin)

Bureaucrats didn't like uncertainty and instability, almost every single one of them. That was the reason why one often saw The Government hurriedly trying to fix the mess only after the actual event had come and gone.

– *“I think it's only possible due to the name value of the Lycan, the man who had correctly predicted the Red Moon, sir.”*

“...I know, right? Well, Mister Hahn-Sung, I know you're busy, so let me not keep you from your work.” (Sae-Jin)

– *“Yes, sir. Take care. Please give me a call if you need anything.”*

Sae-Jin ended the call there. Yu Sae-Jung waited by his side quietly until then, before carefully asking him.

“Seriously now, won't our country be destroyed at this rate?” (Yu Sae-Jung)

“...It's not going to, so don't you worry.” (Sae-Jin)

Kim Yu-Sohn said that he saw countless Boss-level Monsters and many cities being

decimated in his dreams. However, what he saw was not the past that had already happened. No, that was the undetermined future that could be changed at any time.

Since he was planning to expose everything, including the hit list compiled by the Vampires, there were literally a crap ton of variables still left to play yet.

“Look, there are so many geniuses in our country as we speak. Including you, too – aren’t you the youngest ever upper Mid Tier in history? It’s quicker than Miss Yu-Rin by two years, right?” (Sae-Jin)

“...Three years.” (Yu Sae-Jung)

She bashfully corrected him and then fell into his arms.

“The youngest in the world... Well, really. It’s all thanks to Oppa.” (Yu Sae-Jung)

Murmuring the words that were hard to tell whether she was boasting or praising Sae-Jin, Yu Sae-Jung rubbed her face against his chest.

“Ah, right! By the way, I really had no idea that Oppa could fight so well like that. I got really shocked, you know. Didn’t know Oppa was on such a level...” (Yu Sae-Jung)

Suddenly, she began saying something he couldn’t quite catch.

“What are you talking about out of the blue?” (Sae-Jin)

“Mm? You don’t know?” (Yu Sae-Jung)

Yu Sae-Jung tilted her head, before pulling out her phone and then logged on to the official page of the Dawn Order.

“Here. Someone uploaded the CCTV footage when Oppa got ambushed by the Doo-Urk-Shi-Nees, and the whole thing’s getting really hot right now, but... Hmm, maybe because the vid is circulating only within the Knights communities, is that why you didn’t know?” (Yu Sae-Jung)

“...Ah?!”

The story about Sae-Jin being under heavy assault in a foreign country was already a big news locally. It was to a point where the President of the USA had expressed his

regret, even.

“Wait a minute. What is this...” (Sae-Jin)

He got somewhat concerned so he snatched Yu Sae-Jung’s phone away.

Doo-Urk-Shi-Nees could only be seen with naked eyes so they didn’t show up on the CCTV footage, but...

His concerns became reality. The Kim Sae-Jin shown on the screen was busy thrusting swords and spears and other types of weapons at empty air.

“Ah~, that. Even though it looks a bit weird without anyone else there, your movements alone looks really good, you know? Really nice. Plus, those weapons, you are using Mana to form those weapons, right? How did you do that? Every Knight in the country is seemingly dying of curiosity right now. Some are saying, isn’t that like, exceeding the levels of regular sword aura and stuff?”

As if she too wanted to know, Yu Sae-Jung asked him, her eyes sparkling with genuine curiosity.

“No, uh, it’s not what you think, it’s... just my Trait.” (Sae-Jin)

“...Is that so? Anyhow, everyone on the Dawn’s forum are praising it nonstop. There are even talks of asking you to take the Knight exam, since it’s damn shame to waste your talent away.” (Yu Sae-Jung)

“Keum. R, really?”

He couldn’t tell whether that was only her opinion or not, but now that he heard this much praise, the footage felt a bit different to him somehow. The sight of him rapidly slashing the empty air with the Mana sword was...

“In that case, should we spar for a while?” (Sae-Jin)

...It was more than enough to make his shoulders straighten up.

But Yu Sae-Jung lightly shook her head and then said...

“No, well, I... want to do the ‘other’ type of sparring instead of that one.”

Her face flushing deep red, she pushed her face towards his lips.

SFX for door bells ringing

Unfortunately, the ‘other’ type of sparring that was all ready to begin got blocked by the sudden intrusion of the door bells, causing Yu Sae-Jung to frown very deeply. She then grumpily stomped towards the front door and then shouted in dissatisfaction.

“Who is it?!”

That was her anger-ridden loud shout that not one person had heard of until now.

– *“What the... Uh... It, it’s Kim Yu-Rin. Uh... Is Mister Sae-Jin home? I wanted to talk to him regarding the appearances in the talk shows...”*

“.....”

Stunned silly by this development, Yu Sae-Jung signaled Sae-Jin with her eyes and then, hid herself in the dressing room rather promptly.



Buried among all the eerie events where the huge number of Monsters appeared seemingly out of the blue regardless of time and location, several unexplainable ‘incidents’ began taking place as well.

Several reporters, Wizards, Alchemists and even Knights – all these people were met with puzzling accidents and died during the hours where most would be fast asleep.

Although the SID suspected foul play, as there was not one shred of evidence recovered, they could only think of them as victims of the aforementioned unfortunate circumstances.

“...Excuse me, Miss Yu-Rin? Did you hear me? Surely, you can also tell that this is an important matter, no?” (Sae-Jin)

Of course, Sae-Jin knew very well that those deaths were linked to the ‘hit list’. That was why he was in the middle of speaking the hard truths to Kim Yu-Rin, who came to see him regarding her work in the entertainment business.

Unfortunately, she didn't seem to hear him at all. All she did was to mumble continuously about quitting the entertainment industry altogether while carrying an utterly dejected facial expression.

"People are dying left, right and centre, Miss Yu-Rin. But in these dangerous times, you are planning to enter the Monster field all alone late at night? That is not only reckless, but also..." (Sae-Jin)

"You don't have to worry about me. I'm not someone who will easily crumble because of an ambush." (Kim Yu-Rin)

"But still, we don't know what..."

"Even if it's like that, that's not the issue at hand here. I'm quitting the industry not because of the reasons you think, but I fear that I've been focusing too much on the entertainment side of things. As a Knight, I should concentrate on my original duties, instead. And that's one of the reasons why I roam around in the Monster field as well. So, I would really appreciate it if you can respect my wishes." (Kim Yu-Rin)

Saying that there was nothing else left to say, Kim Yu-Rin stood up from her seat. After letting out yet another long sigh, she bowed her head and left.

'What should I do about this now?' (Sae-Jin)

Without a doubt, her current state was because of the Orc.

After Kim Yu-Rin left, Sae-Jin begun massaging his aching head.

"...Is she gone?" (Yu Sae-Jung)

But there was no time to worry about this matter. And that was because, creeping up on him stealthily like a cat, Yu Sae-Jung jumped on him with a strangely flushed face.



A week after Kim Yu-Rin quit the entertainment industry.

Completely unaware of the passage of time, Kim Sae-Jin was busy drifting along on the ocean.

The waves of the East Sea caressed his skin, and the gentle breeze as well as the warm sunlight made both his mind and body to feel rather lethargic.

His current appearance was not of a human but the ‘Leviathan’.

The Leviathan naturally grew bigger without him needing to do anything; the body had grown to 140 centimetres long now, so it was too big to call it ‘Athany’ anymore, and the power this body carried also saw a huge increase as well. To understand how powerful he had become, not one hyena-like opportunistic sea Monster dared to get close to him as he just floated on the water, doing absolutely nothing.

Uuooong...

From a distance, a wave crashed into him. Of course, it wasn’t a naturally occurring phenomenon but Sae-Jin trying to appease his boredom with a bit of impromptu surfing by controlling the water.

Pah-Aaang!

The cresting wave tickled past his skin and created a rollercoaster ride for him in an instant.

‘Another for ma, mother...’ (TL: *Ooookay, so, this random bit of utterance here is our MC suddenly reciting a poem written in the 40s by a Korean poet Yun Dohng-Joo, called “별 헤는 밤”, Tled as “Counting the Stars at Night”. There is an English translation of it floating around the web, done by a bloke named Alex Rose. I’m using his version here.*)

SFX for weapons colliding

While he was peacefully reciting a poem and blissfully enjoying the tranquil calmness of it all, out of the blue, he could hear the harmonious noises of weapons and Mana colliding from a distant beach.

When he raised his head a little to take a gander, he spotted three Knights and an Ogre having an intense battle over there.

Sae-Jin began observing the scene of this untimely battlefield.

Two men and one woman, affiliated with... ‘Goryeo’ Knights Order. It was one of the Orders that were practically pleading with Sae-Jin of late. That was probably because,

the Dawn Order which previously occupied a similar position in the rankings had soared past them and flew towards the heavens, currently competing against the Raven for the top spot, while other rivals were busy forcing their way from below, threatening them.

‘Mm?’

However, out of the three over there, Sae-Jin realised he knew the lone female of the group. It was Jung Eun-Ji. She had been constantly contacting him through his SNS profile, or via the Guild as if her Order, well, ordered her to do so.

‘Well, doesn’t that... look a bit dangerous?’ (Sae-Jin)

Just now, the sword of one of the Knights got broken by the Ogre’s club.

The strength of this particular Ogre seemed high, as it was a Two-Horned Grey Ogre, known to be a cumbersome Monster to fight against. The flow of the battle seemed to be on the knife-edge. Looked like the Knights were holding on thanks to the effects of potions, but...

After observing the battle for a while longer, Sae-Jin decided to help them out a bit in order to test the rapidly-growing Leviathan Form’s current level of combat strength.

He opened his mouth wide and gathered Mana there.

Goooooh...

He changed the naturally-occurring Mana resonating and converging in his mouth into the element that Ogres were weak against: ‘fire’. At the sudden transformation of the atmosphere, storm winds whipped up violently and large ripples expanded out on the water’s surface.

Boasting a deep crimson colour, the flames gathered near the Leviathan’s maws and formed a distinguishable shape, before... firing out like a Dragon’s Breath attack in the blink of an eye.

“...Phew!!”

...Unfortunately, the sound effect was still quite a bit lacking, mostly thanks to his young age.

Still, the flames gathered in front of his mouth exploded out forward like a giant pillar of fire.

The pure flames of hell burned the sea water and the atmosphere around it – and in less than a moment’s breath, it arrived at that distant beach and covered the Ogre’s entire torso.

“Kkyack!!” (Jung Eun-Ji)

“Eu, eu-uh?! What the f*ck!!”

The hyper-hot boiling flames of the ‘Breath’ melted the Ogre’s upper body in one blink, and at this display of overwhelming destructive might, not only the Knights, even Sae-Jin was shocked out of his mind.

‘Wha, what the hell is this sh*t?!’ (Sae-Jin)

Right then, Jung Eun-Ji pointed towards Sae-Jin’s direction after searching the surroundings in a hurry. Panicking somewhat, he quickly dived underwater to escape.



“ ... ”

The three Knights dumbfoundedly stared at the spot where the mysterious creature spouting that flames was just now.

“...What was that?” Asked Jung Eun-Ji.

“It dived under the water’s surface just now.”

One of the male Knights answered, his face still slack from the shock.

“...You know I can also see that, right?” (Jung Eun-Ji)

“Could it have been a dragon?”

“Huh?!” (Jung Eun-Ji)

“I mean...”

The male Knight pointed at the Ogre's half-melted corpse. That incredible pillar of flames didn't stop at simply blasting away the Ogre, but it also blazed past and burned a huge circular hole in the thick forest behind them.

"But well, if that was really a dragon, it should have flown away instead of diving under water, right?" (Jung Eun-Ji)

"...You think so too? It sure is weird, seeing a creature with wings dive into water."

"Yep. It really is weird." (Jung Eun-Ji)

All three of them continued to stare at the distant ocean in awkward silence for a while, hoping that, maybe, the creature might pop back up again.



Finding out that the Leviathan Form possessed this much might proved to be both a great harvest and yet another matter to worry about for Sae-Jin.

If this Form grew up a bit more, then defeating all those Boss-level Monsters appearing in the future would be a piece of cake – but on the flip side, if the only condition for the continued growth was the passage of time, then it also meant that he'd fail at trying to rein in the instincts that were on par with that incredible might pretty soon as well.

SFX for the phone ring

As he drove home while filled to the brim with worries, Sae-Jin's phone suddenly went off. It was from Hazeline, according to the LCD screen.

"Hello, Miss Hazeline. What can I do for you?"

– "Ah, Mister Sae-Jin. Well, nothing in particular, although I'm calling you because, I was thinking, now that a meeting for the potion export deal has been scheduled, wouldn't it be nice~ if Mister Sae-Jin also attends it?"

"...When will it be?"

– "It's next week Tuesday." (Hazeline)

Next week Tuesday... he muttered to himself while combing his memories to see if he had anything scheduled that day. Other than getting achievements as Jin Seh-Hahn, though, he had nothing lined up.

“But, uh... do I really have to show up?” (Sae-Jin)

However, he felt too lazy for that. After all, it wouldn’t be wrong to say he was currently living three separate lives... So, he’d like to not go to meetings where his presence wasn’t absolutely needed.

– *“Ah... Well... Even if you don’t come... But, it’ll be better if you do. I mean, if Mister Sae-Jin does show up, the other party will think, we’re being treated fairly~ and stuff like that. And when the news spreads around, other countries will compete with one another in order to not lose out, right? And so, we lead them on a game of chicken...”*

She began explaining in a haphazard fashion suddenly.

“In that case... I’ll be there.”

– *“Oh, you promise?”*

“Yes. Then, see you there.”

– *“Alright. I’ll see you then.”*

Their ‘business’ had come to an end. Puzzlingly, though, Hazeline spat out a wistful sigh and didn’t hang up first.

“Uh, so, should I hang up first?”

– *“...”*

Hazeline didn’t reply.

She acted this way lately. For some reason, she had been calling him for trivial matters, and the emotions hidden in her voice seemed quite far removed from normal as well.

“Is there something else you’d like to talk about?”

– *“...Actually, you see, I went to a certain restaurant...”*

“I’m hanging up.”

– *“Ah!! Wait!! This is an interesting stor...”*

Kim Sae-Jin resolutely hung up.

CHAPTER 106

ALL TANGLED UP (3)

It was a day in early October, as leaves were dyeing in the Autumn winds.

On a beach located somewhere near the East Sea where the public access was strictly prohibited, quite a few Knights stood there, busy watching the vast blue ocean. Every single one of them were here to satisfy their curiosity, but funnily enough, the rate of gender split was 7 to 3 – there were far more female Knights than males present. And yes, most of the guys who came here did so for the ladies, rather than the sea itself.

“...A hatchling of the ocean, you say?”

With an expression that said how unconvinced he was, a male Knight asked a female Knight.

“Yes. Apparently, it appears on every weekend.”

The female Knight replied with a bright smile.

Although this was still a part of Mid Tier Monster field, everyone present all suffered from high enough ranks and spare time and so, they showed much leisure while treating this beach as a perfect spot for dating.

And the reason why they had gathered here? A single rumour quietly spreading among the ranks of Mid Tier and above.

‘A hatchling of the ocean.’

A cute and charming little Monster that floated on the ocean’s surface. Those Knights who came earlier to take a look said the creature even smiled and waved its ‘hand’ at them.

“Just wait for a little bit longer. I hear it’s really, really cute.”

“Yeah, well... Doesn’t matter to m...”

“Oh!! There it is!”

Then, someone pointed towards the water’s surface and shouted out loudly. Surprised by this outburst, everyone quickly changed the direction of their gazes and sharpened their eyes.

And sure enough, there it was, a single lifeform floating around lazily like a buoy.

Its body may have been slightly on the wrong side of being wide and flat, but thanks to its cute puppy-crossed-with-seal countenance leaving a favourable impression behind, it was nicknamed the hatchling of the ocean.

“Wow~”

Female Knights raised a huge fuss and began taking photos. Many guys present thought that the resulting images wouldn’t be nice since the distance was too far – but then, their collective jaws fell to the floor when they spotted one or two ladies whip out cameras equipped with wide-angle lenses.

“Hey, wait a minute here... It might be cute and all, but still, if that thing is really a hatchling, then... uh, shouldn’t we kill it now? We have no idea what that thing will morph into in the future.” (Unnamed idiot Knight)

What he said was true – even Monsters like Treynos that resembled a rhino, looked cute and cuddly when young, grew up to be a violent and vicious bastard. On top of that, didn’t someone mention that this hatchling was capable of shooting out a Breath attack?

“Huh? You wanna kill it? What nonsense are you spewing out right now?!”

Almost instantly, sharp and hostile stares focused on this guy. He quickly mumbled something about it being a joke while he scratched the back of his neck.



Kim Sae-Jin came out to the East Sea twice a week.

He was thinking that, since he couldn’t do anything about the growth of this Leviathan Form that only needed the passage of time, he might as well enjoy the ocean in the meanwhile. After all, the sea gave peace and tranquility to those who were strong, thus

affording him some time to sort out his thoughts alone.

‘They showed up again.’

However, a handful of ruffians began appearing to disturb his peace lately.

Maybe it was because he was still stuck in some kind of transition period in its growth, this Athany Form moved rather slowly in water. And that was why he chose to swim as close to the land mass as possible. But as if the rumours had gotten around, way too many onlookers had come around to gawk at him.

Initially, since the number was low, he thought their actions were cute and so didn’t feel too bothered by them. Hell, he even performed a public service and waved his hand at them, too.

But as time went on, more and more people showed up, and whenever they saw Sae-Jin, they began screaming ‘*kkyack, kkyack*’...So, how could he get some much needed peace and tranquility in this chaos?

Even worse, as Sae-Jin was doing his best to suppress his rising irritation...

“Shouldn’t we kill it now?”

The words caught in his sensitive hearing caused his blood to boil in anger.

‘Speaking some harsh words there, aren’t you...’

And so, Sae-Jin decided to put fear of god in them, and then, began controlling the sea.

Wuuuuooong...

From the bottom of the ocean, an ominous vibration could be felt.

Soon after, the sounds of the Knights’ cheering stopped.

All of them dumbfoundedly stared past Sae-Jin the Athany, towards the vast ocean.

And then... rather than cheers, they began screaming at the top of their lungs, and THEN, began running for their lives without even looking back.

Only then did Sae-Jin realise something had gone terribly wrong, so he turned around to see what was happening.

“.....”

KHUG00000

A massive wave that was over 30 metres tall was crashing towards the coastline like an undulating lifeform.

“...*phew.*”

...*Oh.*

So, a Leviathan can become this strong while in the water, huh.

That was Sae-Jin’s dazed thoughts just before he got swallowed up by the immense wave.



“ ”
...

Around 20 minutes later.

Stealthily changing back to the human appearance, Sae-Jin was hurriedly walking within the Monster field.

Thankfully, he regained his composure in the middle of the wave and weakened the ferocity of it, so the actual damage to human lives should be minimal, but... Unfortunately, trees, plants, sand, whatever as far as his eyes could see, were all soaked to the bone by the sea water.

‘What a troll move this was.’

Whenever he walked, water splashed below his feet. On top of that, the urgent notification sounded loudly from his smart watch, relaying an emergency message.

[From the Ministry of Public Safety and Security] [Emergency situation. October 8th 16:13. 20 metre-high tsunami waves detected on the coast of the East Sea. We urge all the residents living near the East Sea in Gangwon Province as well as Knights currently in the Monster field to evacuate the area immediately.]

Sae-Jin scratched the back of his neck while reading the message. A momentary lapse in controlling his powers had led to a huge mess...

‘I better run away.’

Kim Sae-Jin hurriedly moved his feet.

But as he was running away in haste, he couldn’t help but come to a stand still after finding a rather familiar silhouette in the distance.

Her long hair tied in braids and pulled up in a clean style, revealing a white and slender neck; a narrow waist and contrastingly well endowed hips – the woman who was just as stunning even from behind, Kim Yu-Rin.

He heard that she ‘came to work’ to Monster field everyday – currently, she was staring at a certain place while completely soaked from head to toe. Sae-Jin slowly walked towards her, who looked kind of lonely.

“Miss Yu-Rin.”

At his gentle call, she ended up getting spooked rather wonderfully.

“Uhm... Guild Master? What are you doing here...” (Kim Yu-Rin)

Kim Sae-Jin smiled almost imperceptibly.

“I was out hunting, but then, a tsunami just so happened to rush in. But what are you doing here, Miss Yu-Rin? Looks like you got done in by the waves – didn’t you receive the emergency notification to evacuate?”

“No, I, uh, did receive it, but...” (Kim Yu-Rin)

She swallowed the rest of her sentence down in slight bitterness. At the end of where

she had been looking at, was the village of the Hero Orcs. The sudden waves did hit the surrounding mud walls but thankfully, there didn't seem to be any further issues beyond that.

"We're told to evacuate, so let's go." (Sae-Jin)

Kim Yu-Rin alternated her gaze between the village and Sae-Jin before powerlessly nodding her head. Soon, the two of them began walking through the Monster field.

Probably because of the effects of the tsunami (?), the entire Monster field seemed cloaked heavily in deep silence, as if all the Monsters and Knights had ran off to somewhere safe and dry.

They conversed while crossing the wet forest. Well, Sae-Jin was the one talking, while Kim Yu-Rin just listened.

"You seem to lack energy for some reason lately." (Sae-Jin)

"Pardon? Ah... No, it's just that, I've been feeling the 'wall'. Recently, worries about things like, 'Can I grow even further than this' have been entering my thoughts."

"Is that so? To think that a Highest Tier Knight thinks of such matters..." (Sae-Jin)

It was right then.

From somewhere, a strange fluctuation of Mana could be felt. Kim Yu-Rin too had sensed this oddity and quickly unsheathed her sword.

"...There is something out here. Guild Master, please stick behind me."

The moment her expression hardened, the atmosphere changed rapidly. Now, they could sense the flow of Mana more openly, and she quickly dragged Sae-Jin to her rear as if to hide him and vigilantly surveyed the surrounding areas.

"I also know how to fight, Miss Yu-Rin."

However, Kim Sae-Jin formed a weapon with Mana and stepped forward.

Just now, a certain scent of blood tickled his nose. Being able to hide one's presence and scent to this degree meant that the 'guest' this time was not going to be a simple

pushover.

‘Looks like them carrying out the hits on the hit list wasn’t an unrealistic feat, after all.’
(Sae-Jin)

SFX for smoke rising suddenly

Then, smoke began pouring out and four humanoid shapes rose up from the ground. Out of the four, three of them were totally covered in red robes, but this one guy alone had his face fully displayed.

Pale white skin and eyes dyed in the colours of blood.

The handsome man smiled in an entirely suspicious manner and looked at both Sae-Jin and Kim Yu-Rin’s direction.

“A pleasant day’s greetings to you both. And we should thank the advent of one unexpected calamity, as we are finally able to grace each other’s company.”

Inside this rather desolate forest, a man wearing a formal black-tie suit greeted the two in a stiff manner of an European nobility that matched his Western face.

“I am Count Rahaimde. I’ve woken up from a long slumber and made this arduous personal journey in order to reap both of your lives with my own two hands.”

The tone of his voice was deeply exaggerated and theatrical. Sae-Jin and Kim Yu-Rin both narrowed their brows dumbfoundedly at the sudden entrance of this anachronistic man. What the hell was up with this strange stage actor-like dude?

Then, Sae-Jin remembered it.

“Rahaimde...”

After a short murmuring later, Sae-Jin’s eyes opened wide.

“Ah.”

Now he understood why this name rang a bell.

The House of Count Rahaimde. A renowned noble back in the other world, Rahaimde

even served as a Margrave in a certain corrupt kingdom, even though he was a Vampire. In other words, his skills were quite considerable.

Of course, his House had been in decline for ages already. And when he came to Earth, he fell into a coma because of all the Vampire hunting back in the past. The Vampire Lord might have granted the man his second life, but still, his ability could not be dismissed as something trivial.

In terms of the actual combat prowess, Rahaimde was a powerful figure that none of the current Vampire Lord descendants could ignore.

The Vampires in the Rahaimde House could control 'blood' at will. Not only their own, but the others as well, provided the target had come in contact with the Rahaimde blood.

The viciously cruel and battle-loving Rahaimde carried about 2~3 times more blood within his body, and slaughtered all living things who obviously couldn't live without blood... or so Sae-Jin had heard.

Sae-Jin also heard from the spy he had planted amidst the Vampires that this Rahaimde was someone to watch out for.

"...Who is this crazy bastard?" (Kim Yu-Rin)

"Ahahaha. For a lady, your words are rather unrefined, no?" (Rahaimde)

Kim Yu-Rin sharply glared at the Vampires. Then, Rahaimde smiled leisurely and expelled blood out from his body. And it sure was a grotesque sight to behold, blood endlessly pouring out from all the holes in his body – eyes, nose, ears, sweat pores, etc, etc.

"What the hell is that..." (Kim Yu-Rin)

The blood exiting into the air spread widely around like a red mist. Kim Yu-Rin had covered herself in the ever-reliable Mana Barrier, but she sensed a certain trepidation from that red mist so she quickly took several steps back.

"A Mana Barrier? Hahaha. I'll have you know, such petty trickery will not aid you today." (Rahaimde)

The thinly-dispersing blood particles were smaller than Mana – no bigger than atoms, in fact – and could easily permeate past the Mana Barrier and enter through one's skin. And if a minute amount of that blood entered the target's body, then, *BOOM!!* The blood contained within the body would explode.

"And with this... This will be our fourth successful mission." (Rahaimde)

Rahaimde thought about the hit list and a grin broke out on his face.

And when the red mist slowly approached his targets...

His blood in gaseous form suddenly coagulated back into liquid and fell down to the ground.

"...Huh?!" (Rahaimde)

Falling into a confused state of panic, Rahaimde tried to control his blood once more. Unfortunately for him, the blood on the ground didn't even budge as if it had turned into a stone.

"Miss Yu-Rin, looks like we don't have to worry anymore." (Sae-Jin)

Meanwhile, Sae-Jin glanced at Rahaimde and chuckled.

This was the reason why Sae-Jin remembered Rahaimde's name so clearly.

Blood was a form of moisture, but not all moisture was blood. To figure out which of the two was superior between the ability to control all moisture and the ability to control only blood, one didn't need to think too deeply about it.

"Fortunately, my Trait seems to overwhelm his." (Sae-Jin)

Of course, as Sae-Jin's Skill Proficiency Level was still low, the Vampire would hold an advantage in terms of 'area of effect', but that much could be overcome with Kim Yu-Rin helping him out.

"...What crazy nonsense are you blabbering on about, you knave!!!" (Rahaimde)

The previously-dazed Rahaimde took offense at Sae-Jin's words and roared out at the top of his lungs in an unbridled rage that could rip the heavens apart. He then

extracted even more blood out from his body and changed it into numerous shapes that resembled needles before shooting them out.

Rahaimde believed that, without a doubt, this barrage of blood needles would pierce through the gaps of Mana and definitely kill the two targets.

“What?! But, why!! I say, why?!” (Rahaimde)

Too bad. Just like before, his blood powerlessly liquified as soon as it got near the two and fell to the ground. Rahaimde stomped on the ground like a petulant child and exploded in a fit of rage.

“I, I will, rip apart those two scums with...!!” (Rahaimde)

Unable to calm his soaring anger, Rahaimde extracted even more blood out from his body again.

Kim Yu-Rin was busy tilting her head in confusion, unable to figure out what this Vampire was trying to do, while Sae-Jin was barely holding back his laughter from leaking out.

“Eu, euuhhhhh!!!!” (Rahaimde)

Out from Rahaimde’s entire body, blood rose up powerfully.

...Seeing this, Sae-Jin thought that, if left alone, this Rahaimde guy would keel over automatically after tiring himself out.

CHAPTER 107

ALL TANGLED UP (4)

“But, what...” (Kim Yu-Rin)

“Just leave him be. It’ll be better for us if he tires himself out like that.” (Sae-Jin)

Kim Yu-Rin and Sae-Jin looked at Rahaimde, their eyes shining with interest. The Vampire’s body had swelled up like a puffer fish while he continued to struggle – it almost seemed like he’d go *POP* at any moment now.

“...But still, Guild Master, do you have an inkling as to what is happening here right now?” (Kim Yu-Rin)

Meanwhile, Kim Yu-Rin asked Sae-Jin as she glanced at him with the corner of her eyes. She found this situation totally not understandable. Out of the blue, a tsunami wave swept by without warning, then Kim Sae-Jin appeared out of seemingly nowhere, and then, getting ambushed by a crazy guy and his gang, to boot...

“Ah, that. Well... I did tell you, right? Currently...” (Sae-Jin)

“Gheu uhhhhh!!” (Rahaimde)

Before Sae-Jin could explain, with a loud roar, the Vampire’s amassed blood pounced on them like a raging sea current. The blood wriggled around like a living being, but still, it fell to the ground powerlessly as soon as it got near Sae-Jin’s vicinity.

“...Currently, there have been a lot of unexplained incidents. These guys are the culprits responsible.” (Sae-Jin)

“Culprits?” (Kim Yu-Rin)

“Yes. The Lycan said that the Vampires are planning something really big and evil, and this is apparently their first step. Getting rid of those who might cause trouble for them later on – the so-called ‘hit list’, in other words.” (Sae-Jin)

“.....Why are you telling me about such an important matter only now?!” (Kim Yu-

Rin)

Falling in a silent daze for a moment, Kim Yu-Rin suddenly shouted out, flustered. Another demonstration of how heavy the Lycan's name value was, right there.

"We've already set the date for the press conference to do that exactly. And I've mentioned this to you before, remember? That it's dangerous for you to move around alone." (Sae-Jin)

"...You... well, you did, but... But still, you should've told me the details..." (Kim Yu-Rin)

"But the rumours have spread around already, though?" (Sae-Jin)

For now, they have remained tight-lipped at the government's request, but rumours of the Lycan planning to announce something big as well as the existence of a certain hit list had been in circulation within the financial world and between Knights for some time by now.

"Is, is that right? I've been preoccupied lately, so..." (Kim Yu-Rin)

"Eu uhhhh!!"

Another abnormal roar resounded out in the middle of their conversation.

"...In any case, you're saying that person over there is a Vampire?" (Kim Yu-Rin)

"Yes. You can tell that he's an evil doer pretty easily, no?" (Sae-Jin)

Kim Yu-Rin nodded lightly and poured Mana into her sword. Sharp and chilly blue Mana clung on to the surface of the slightly-chipped blade.

"Sir Rahaimde, please get a hold on yourself." (Unnamed Vampire goon)

Only when that razor-sharp threat surfaced did the other Vampires begin trying to stop Rahaimde's madness.

"...Fuu."

Looking as if he had lost over half of his original strength, Rahaimde finally stopped his crazed rampage. And while working hard to restore his calm demeanor, a thin

smile slowly formed on his lips.

“Hahaha. How regrettable. That was your only chance to lessen the suffering and pain, but you have voluntarily surrendered such a wondrous opportunity...”

Indeed, it was regrettable for Sae-Jin as well, as Rahaimde changed tactic and unsheathed the sword mounted on his hips. It was crimson coloured as if made out of blood; at the same time, other three Vampires began reciting a chant.

“Miss Yu-Rin. Please maintain a certain distance from me while we engage the enemies.” (Sae-Jin)

Now that Rahaimde had lost his stupidity for good, Sae-Jin too had lost all the leisure as well.

“And whatever happens, do not let that sword touch you.” (Sae-Jin)

That blood-red sword in Rahaimde’s hands – there really was blood soaked into the blade. No matter how superior Sae-Jin’s Trait was, as long as the moisture wasn’t airborne, he couldn’t control it. So, even the smallest cut would prove totally disastrous.

“I’ve been fighting for over ten years now. So, don’t worry about me.” (Kim Yu-Rin)

Kim Yu-Rin was confident, as always.

Sae-Jin let a slight chuckle out and concentrated Mana into his hand. The blue-coloured Mana shifted into a weapon that was perfect for the foe at hand, a lengthy spear that could help him maintain a safe distance.

“...Go.” (Unnamed Vampire goon)

Unfortunately, the opponent wasn’t only Rahaimde. Before they knew it, the chanting of the other Vampires were complete, and countless Monsters were summoned to the area.

SFX for a loud roar of a Monster

The owner of the roar that shook the earth was the guardian of the underworld, Cerberus. Hundreds of Gargoyles blanketed the sky above. Giant Worms wiggled and

burrowed their way out from the ground, accompanied by hundreds of creatures such as Golems and Ghouls.

“..”

Against this horde, a lengthy spear wasn't going to cut it. So, Sae-Jin stealthily changed the shape of the weapon. And when Kim Yu-Rin accidentally saw the newly-formed weapon, her eyes went extra-round.

In his hand was a blue mace.

“You know how to wield that?” (Kim Yu-Rin)

A mace was avoided by most of the Knights as it was a difficult weapon to master. Firstly, the might of this weapon heavily depended upon the wielder's physical strength rather than the proficiency in controlling Mana. And then, because of its unusual shape, concentrating Mana into a blunt form to fit the weapon was also incredibly hard as well.

“...Let's talk about that later!” (Sae-Jin)

Too bad, Kim Yu-Rin couldn't get to hear his answer.

Koong! Koong!! Koong!!!

Triggered by Rahaimde's roar, all the Monsters surrounding the two rushed in.

Sae-Jin swung his mace towards the incoming flood of Monsters.

Every swing of the mace ripped asunder the very air they breathed, and each strike turned Golems into crumbs of stone, while Ghouls were shredded apart into pieces. He didn't bother with things like technique. Just a single, complete swing of that mace was enough to blow up dozens of Monsters into smithereens.

‘That is... ’ (Kim Yu-Rin)

And Kim Yu-Rin's eyes went even more rounder than before, as she even forgot about the grave situation she was in and observed Sae-Jin's fight. It might have looked like he was swinging that mace willy-nilly with total disregard for separating enemies from allies, but hidden within that simple whirlwind of destruction, there definitely

was a rule of some kind.

Enemies approaching closer were killed off relying only on brutal strength. And the moment when an attack was about to land on him, Sae-Jin struck the ground instead and caused a massive quake. And during the opening created by that very quake, he dashed in and landed a deadly blow to the Monster's head...

Kwahaang!!!

The mace slammed on the ground once more and yet another powerful tremor erupted out.

Just like that, with a few well-timed mace slams on the ground, the entire battlefield turned into a land of unbridled chaos mired in cruel viciousness. Only things left behind on the broken and jutting landscape was a scene straight out of hell, torn and mangled bits of flesh and blood showering and littering everywhere.

‘How can he fight like that Orc...?’ (Kim Yu-Rin)

Although the overall power and the ferocity were so much weaker, that battle style was something Kim Yu-Rin was intimately familiar with. She was sure of it, since she had sparred countless times with the Hero Orc Chieftain.

Of course, it was currently impossible for her to agonise over how Sae-Jin seemingly had absorbed and used the Orc's fighting style as if it was his own.

SFX for a loud roar of a Monster

The mist of Monsters' blood clinging on its body, the Cerberus spewed flames of hell from its three mouths before baring its vicious fangs and pounced on her.

“Heup!!”

However, such summoned creatures were easy for Kim Yu-Rin to deal with.

For her Trait ‘Desideratum’, imbuing the purpose of ‘snatching the life away from a living being’ was impossible even against the most insignificant creatures – but the story changed drastically if the recipient was a summoned.

As long as she wasn't fighting against a Monster like the Leviathan, which couldn't be

summoned without a catalyst or be un-summoned without getting rid of that said catalyst, cancelling the summoning was actually far easier than knocking the creature out.

KHEUHhhhhh...

Although it was the slightest of tickles by her sword, the Cerberus couldn't even finish its roar before disappearing completely.

Of course, it was still the guardian of hell. Yu-Rin sensed nearly 20% of her Mana reserve draining out of her. She then quickly kicked the ground and headed towards the three Vampire Wizards who were trying to redo the summoning.

"...You despicable scum!!" (Rahaimde)

Rahaimde ignored Yu-Rin shooting past him and focused only on Sae-Jin. He was like a prize racehorse looking only forward; he even slaughtered Monsters summoned by his men when they ended up blocking his way.

"You insolent fool!!" (Rahaimde)

Arriving in front of Sae-Jin, Rahaimde grandly slashed out with his sword.

The blood-red sword drew a half-moon arc as it successfully sliced apart Sae-Jin's Mana mace in two. A thick smile crept up on Rahaimde's mouth, and as his prized 'blood sword' was about to thrust into Sae-Jin's chest...

"!!!"

Rahaimde sensed a threat of looming death coming from behind and he quickly rolled on the ground to avoid it.

Almost at the same time, a lone blue spike shot up from the ground the Vampire was standing on moments ago. He didn't even have time to wonder what the hell that was – the threat of death brushed past his senses once more, and then...

"Kkheuck!!"

Another blue spike shot up and sliced open a wound on Rahaimde's body.

“What sort of cheap trickery is this?!” (Rahaimde)

The blue spikes continued to inundate him even in the middle of his shouts.

SFX for sharp things flying through the air

The spikes no longer appeared only from the ground, but also started pouring down from the air as well while making ear-piercing whistles. Rahaimde hurriedly beat a hasty retreat, but those blue spikes didn't give him any breathing room whatsoever and persistently chased him down.

“...!!!”

Rahaimde thought of getting assistance from the fellow Vampires, but when he took a glance, he could see that the situation over there was just as bad as here. No, it looked actually worse. A single sword slash from Kim Yu-Rin easily sliced apart one of the Vampire Wizards and his magic shield, and the rushing Gargoyles trying to protect their owners couldn't even leave behind a scratch mark on her Mana Barrier.

“A bunch of useless... Urk!!” (Rahaimde)

Just as his focus shifted for a brief second, a mace was thrown towards his way. Rahaimde could only issue a short cry as the weapon struck him right in the middle of his forehead and he collapsed on the ground.

“...Eut!”

As soon as Rahaimde was out for the count, Sae-Jin turned all his attention towards the rest of the Monsters.

However... his consciousness began to drift away. As expected, trying to control external Mana not of his own placed too much of a burden on him. The whole thing didn't even last one minute, yet... As things stood, he probably didn't even have much Mana left in him to form another weapon.

WAKE UP!!

Just as his mind was blacking out and the boiling instincts were about to burst forth from within and replace the 'human' Kim Sae-Jin...

A lone shout from somewhere stabbed his ears. Sae-Jin struggled hard to regain control of his fading consciousness, and resolutely opened his eyes wider. He then grabbed the head of a Ghoul with a voracious, drooling jaw and crushed it.

SFX for a sword slash

After that, a crystal clear sword aura swept across the battlefield, slicing apart all the Monsters surrounding him.



On a certain area within the Monster field.

There were shredded bits of flesh and blood strewn about everywhere; the ground was completely devastated, not one spot avoiding destruction.

"...Pant, pant..."

Within this bloody hell, Sae-Jin was sitting weakly on the ground, trying to catch his breath.

This battle would have been a piece of cake if he changed into either the Orc or the Lycanthrope, but as a mere 'human', he literally had to go through hell. And now, he was beset with the type of fatigue he had never ever felt before in his entire life, something that could only come after squeezing every ounce of Mana out from himself and moving his body to the absolute physical limit.

Kim Yu-Rin's condition was marginally better. Although totally covered in sweat, she still had some strength left to stand unassisted. However, she was currently pouring that strength into making her brain spin a bit faster.

She recalled the sight of Sae-Jin wielding that mace once more. Someone once said that, each and every fighter had their own unique way of fighting. Sae-Jin's way was incredibly similar to that of the Hero Orc. Even the appearance of him roaring out while rampaging around was the same, too.

Kim Yu-Rin turned to focus her gaze on him. He certainly looked a lot weaker than the

Orc, sitting on the ground and panting heavily – still, she observed him for a long, long time with a pair of suspicious eyes, before opening her mouth.

“Mister Kim Sae-Jin.”

A sudden intrusion of a cold voice pricked his ear drums.

“...Ye, yes?”

He turned his head to look. Kim Yu-Rin was staring at him with an incredibly sharp pair of eyes.

“ ... ”

As she stared at him, several questions regarding this and that floated around in her head.

A similar battle style to that of the Hero Orc’s... And previously, he said he was friendly with the Hero Orcs and could arrange a meeting with the Chieftain. And now that she thought about it, she began to wonder why he had been using the name ‘the Orc’ when working as a blacksmith.

“So, let’s say, hypothetically...” (Kim Yu-Rin)

Her voice was heavy and serious. Sae-Jin’s body trembled imperceptibly as if he too sensed the warning signs.

“...Maybe, just maybe...” (Kim Yu-Rin)

She then stopped talking there.

What is the relationship between this man and the Orc? He probably cannot completely deny having any ties with the Orc. There is definitely something wrong here. Definitely something...

“...Uhm, what should we do about that guy over there?” (Kim Yu-Rin)

Unfortunately, she couldn’t spit out what she was thinking about, and ended up pointing at Rahaimde who was lying sprawled on the ground.

“...Ah. Uh... well, let’s apprehend him, for now...” (Sae-Jin)

Feeling panicky inside, Sae-Jin did his best to maintain a poker face while he grabbed Rahaimde.

CHAPTER 108

ALL TANGLED UP (5)

“...What are you going to do with that Vampire?” (Kim Yu-Rin)

Inside the British luxury SUV, Kim Yu-Rin’s favourite ride.

Kim Yu-Rin signaled towards the quietly-prone Rahaimde on the back seat using her eyes and asked.

“Hmm. Well, I could hand him over to the SID... something like that.” (Sae-Jin)

Sae-Jin had half a mind to make sure the vile bastard would never wake up again, since it seemed the unconscious Vampire was far too strong for the Dark Energy Link to properly work.

But then, he didn’t want to give up on earning yet another bit of achievement by bringing this guy in, as cheap as that sounded. Also, it was still illegal to summarily execute a Vampire without going through a proper trial.

“Hmph.”

Kim Yu-Rin snorted once.

No more conversation happened after that. He did try his best to initiate one, but her facial expression was way too stiff for that. It was as if she was locked into some serious thought process or some such.

Since Sae-Jin had something to feel guilty about anyways, he decided to follow the old mantra of ‘Doing nothing leads one down the middle path’.

“Wait!! What are you doing?” (Sae-Jin)

“...Huh?”

“We’re going the wrong way!!” (Sae-Jin)

Unfortunately, though – Kim Yu-Rin wasn't paying attention to her driving and as a result, she missed the off ramp and ended up going straight ahead. She hurriedly looked around for a chance to turn the vehicle around, but well, they were on a piece of road where making a U-turn was impossible.

“W, why didn't you tell me sooner?!” (Kim Yu-Rin)

After giving up, she sent a gaze full of resentment towards Sae-Jin in the passenger side.

“Why are you getting angry at me?” (Sae-Jin)

“I've never driven on this road before. And it hasn't been long since I got my licence, so I'm not that good a driver yet. But here I am, tasked to bringing Mister Sae-Jin back home...” (Kim Yu-Rin)

Only after going the wrong way did Kim Yu-Rin concentrate on her driving.

And time relentlessly marched on. 20 minutes, 30 minutes, 40 minutes... Crossing a distance which 10 minutes would have sufficed, cost them one full hour, and worse still, they were...

“Wait, isn't that the city of Pyongyang?” (Sae-Jin)

From Gangwon Province to Pyongyang in one hour!!... As expected of an extraordinary invention, the Mana Car.

“.....” (Kim Yu-Rin)

“To drive all the way till Pyongyang from Gangwon without the aid of a map... Truly impressive, Miss Yu-Rin. Great driving.” (Sae-Jin)

All Kim Yu-Rin could do at Sae-Jin's sarcastic remark was to pout unceasingly and silently steer the car.

“I wonder, how long will we need to go to Gangwon from here.” (Sae-Jin)

“...If you don't stop now, I will leave you behind here.” (Kim Yu-Rin)

As far as she was concerned, that sounded like an effective warning, but for Sae-Jin, it

was actually not a bad suggestion to consider.

“I can take over driving for you, if you’d like. But besides that, why haven’t you turned on the satnav?” (Sae-Jin)

Sae-Jin reached towards the centre console to switch on the GPS navigation. However, she slapped his hand away while narrowing her brows.

“I have my pride, Mister Sae-Jin. Please do not interfere.” (Kim Yu-Rin)

“...”

Pride? What pride?!

Sae-Jin dumbfoundedly stared at her.

A pair of stiff-as-rock hands grabbing the steering wheel tightly; her neck cranked out like that of an elderly turtle while her face contorted unnaturally as she surveyed the surroundings... No way in hell something like pride had a room in that.

‘I just hope that we get there within two hours...’ (Sae-Jin)

“Keu, keuuuuu...”

It was then, the ‘drunkard’ lying on the backseat showed signs of waking up. Sae-Jin quickly formed another mace and slammed it hard on the forehead of the waking Vampire.

Kkhoong!!

Accompanied a dull sound of impact, Rahaimde’s face sank back down the seat cushion.

“...By the way, how long has it been since you started using a mace?” (Kim Yu-Rin)

Kim Yu-Rin asked after observing him doing his thing, but then...

“No way!! You entered the wrong road, again!!” (Sae-Jin)

“What?! No, no, that can’t be!” (Kim Yu-Rin)

One hour it was, for them to reach Pyongyang from Gangwon. But the return trip took two solid hours.

While regretting the decision to ride on Kim Yu-Rin's car right down to the bones, Kim Sae-Jin finally made his way back home.



The following day.

Sae-Jin went to speak to Yu Baek-Song regarding what to do about Rahaimde. He suggested that, since there were a few suspicious individuals within the ranks of the SID, the captured Vampire should be locked up in the underground prison located below the Mercenary Company HQ where Mana couldn't be wielded. She consented to the idea.

After the meeting ended sooner than expected, Yu Baek-Song handed over a magazine about Knights over to him.

[The Knights Academy's most famous martial arts – 'quickest to become a Mid Tier' Jin Seh-Hahn's technique]

– Slow motion of the footage, breakdown of fist and foot movement, reading the flow of the fight, etc, etc... A thorough lecture containing all this, and more. The number of learners attending the lectures of Jin Seh-Hahn's "Jin Mudo" school has exceeded 300. The approval rating of the learners show no sign of decline; only the continuous upward climb.

Several Cadets have been seen without carrying a weapon within the Academy grounds of late, and such behaviour is not being looked down on, either.

And we at XX magazine, are proud to present to you a timely interview with a hero emerging from the darkness like a rapid meteor blazing across the sky.

It was about Jin Seh-Hahn. Sae-Jin's brows furrowed as he read the article.

"You've become a real celebrity, huh." (Yu Baek-Song)

There was a leisurely smile hanging on Yu Baek-Song's lips as she looked at him.

Ever since she had climbed to the position of the Minister of Monster Affairs, she was constantly reminded of Kim Sae-Jin and his influences. Bosses that constantly got on her nerves were no more; even those petty attempts to hinder her saw a sharp decrease, 'them' unable to publically challenge her and remaining only as nothing more than some weak yapping behind her back.

It was the first time in her professional career where she could experience a stress-free work environment every single day, so she was understandably happy.

"...But, this might become a bigger problem if I get more famous than this..." (Sae-Jin)

In reality, the identity of Jin Seh-Hahn was one-time use only.

Although Sae-Jin said his goal was to reach the High Tier during the interview, the main aim was to get to the upper Mid Tier instead, where he'd gain the access to the information he was looking for. The original plan was to have the upper Mid Tier Jin Seh-Hahn meet with an untimely accident before he could become a High Tier, thereby leaving behind a tragic but juicy story for all.

"Argh, don't worry about that. A hero is an existence that gifts hope to the masses even in his death. Besides that, I see you've been getting along ve~ry well with fellow Knights, eh?" (Yu Baek-Song)

Yu Baek-Song clumsily dug out a mobile phone from somewhere.

It was indeed a mobile phone. Sae-Jin's eyes opened wide after witnessing something he thought he'd never see, since all of their communication involved landlines or via those magic notebooks right up until recently.

"You bought a mobile phone?" (Sae-Jin)

"Yep."

Yu Baek-Song showed him an image from the Internet search results. It was of Jin Seh-Hahn, Yi Yu-Jin and Goh Yun-Jong. Seeing this, Sae-Jin let out a forced chuckle and reached out towards the phone – only to have his hand angrily slapped away by Yu Baek-Song, who carefully embraced the phone in her chest as if it was the most precious treasure in the whole world.

"..."

“No touch.”

“Ah. Oh, sorry...” (Sae-Jin)

Afterwards, she continued to fidget around the phone with those small hands of hers. And whenever she found something funny, she’d laugh out loud like a kid and told him to take a look.

It was as if... for someone like her who had lived a dreary life without a phone until now, she had finally discovered a whole new world to explore.

Sae-Jin quietly studied her for a while. Funnily enough, he didn’t feel bored watching her. He could only blame her gently-swaying tail and that pair of twitching cat ears on top of her head.

“...You know that the Lycan’s press conference is next month, yes?” (Sae-Jin)

“Mm? Of course I know.” (Yu Baek-Song)

“And do you also know that, as a slight exaggeration, the contents are related to the end of the world?” (Sae-Jin)

“...”

She didn’t even bother to answer him. After all, with her ears standing stiff and her eyes opened wide, she was totally immersed on a video she found online. It must have been a very interesting video, indeed...

Figuring that he had to snatch that phone away for the conversation to progress, Sae-Jin slowly reached out, but...

SFX for a low, threatening growl

...He had to withdraw his hand when he saw her glaring at him while baring her fangs, growling.

Sae-Jin could only stay there and witness her completely engrossed in the wonders of the Internet for the next 20 minutes, before leaving the place with the words, “I should get going now, another meeting to go to.”

Unfortunately, that video didn't end until then.

Curious as to what she was watching so intently, Sae-Jin took a peek. He found her watching... an episode of the programme 'Animal Kingdom' that featured daily lives of untamed tigers in the wilderness. Chuckling to himself, Sae-Jin left her office without a proper send-off.

Walking towards the car park, he quickly climbed aboard his car and set the destination on the satnav to a certain restaurant in Gangwon Province.

With a good timing, his phone rang at the same time.

– *“Hi, Mister Sae-Jin, where are you now?”*

The friendly voice of an Elf, Hazeline's, came out of the receiver.

“I'm on my way as we speak. What about you, Miss Hazeline?”

– *“I'm also getting ready to set off... riding on a bus.”*

“A bus?!”

– *“Yes.”*

Sae-Jin checked the time and the destination. There was enough room to spare, fortunately enough.

“In that case, wait for me at your place. I'll come and pick you up.”

– *“Pardon? No, no, you don't have to do that...”*

“Oh? If you feel that way, then...”

– *“I'll be waiting for you at home~.”*

Hazeline hurriedly ended the call.

Smiling slightly, Sae-Jin turned on the ignition and stepped on the accelerator.



“Over here~.”

After around five minutes, he could see a woman wearing a thick robe waving her hands through the windscreen. He was about to hit the brake to slow the car down, but then, felt the deeply-suppressed urge to play a prank rush out and take over...

“...Huh? W, where are you going?! Mister Sae-Jin!! Over here!! Heeey!! Stop!!!!”
(Hazeline)

He deliberately didn't stop the car and continued on. When he took a glance through the rear-view mirror, he saw Hazeline hurriedly running after the car, looking rather flustered.

This went on for another 200 metres or so. Thinking that he should probably end it here, he stopped the car and opened the passenger side door.

“Pant, pant... Pant, pant...”

Panting heavily thanks to the untimely sprint done with all her power, she grabbed the door frame real tightly and shot him a glare – he was sure of Hazeline glaring at him, even though the hood was covering her eyes. But Sae-Jin maintained a nonchalant expression and held open the door.

“Ah, my apologies. Forgot where you lived.” (Sae-Jin)

“Pant, pant... Forgot? Really? You were not like this before, but you seemed to have developed a mischievous streak lately. Would you like to taste the bitterness of a magic spell...?” (Hazeline)

“Get in. Or else I'll move the car again.” (Sae-Jin)

“ ... ”

She pulled the hood off as soon as she sat down on the passenger seat. She seemed unhappy, sweat from the unnecessary exercise sliding down on her face. However, the strands of wet hair clinging on to her skin only made her look more alluring.

“Shall we go?” (Sae-Jin)

“...Yes.”

While on their way towards the restaurant, she didn't talk but continuously recited something to herself. Judging by how official the words sounded, they must have been either a script she had prepared in advance or the breakdown on various information she wanted to present.

And they arrived at the restaurant located in Seoul after 20 minutes of driving.

However, the scene surrounding that place was quite something else to behold.

There was a limo with the national flag of France draped all over it, as well as dozen escort vehicles filling up the entire parking lot, not to mention the countless bodyguards carrying swords on their waists guarding the area.

“What the... Did the Prime Minister come personally or something?” (Sae-Jin)

“He did.” (Hazeline)

“...Huh?!” (Sae-Jin)

“Prime Minister Roland has made his way here personally. That's why the meeting had been delayed slightly, to accommodate his busy schedule.”

“But, I didn't hear of such a thing...?” (Sae-Jin)

“Oh, you haven't? I'm sorry. It's probably because Mister Sae-Jin has a habit of ignoring other people's phone calls.”

Hazeline spoke as if it was nothing much and entered the restaurant. Kim Sae-Jin stood there dazed for a bit, before finally moving his feet after one of the bodyguards walked over to his direction.



Unlike with the USA, the meeting with the representatives from France who had all flew over to Korea personally, concluded rather smoothly.

After hearing the French Prime Minister greet him in Korean, saying “it's an honour”, Sae-Jin found himself unable to speak properly – but Hazeline was quite the opposite,

speaking her piece out like a professional. So much so, it was impossible to tell that this woman was the very same person who stuttered like there's no tomorrow during the seminar back then.

At the end of the two-hour long meeting, it was decided that the next country to receive the potion exports would be France. Sae-Jin quickly ran back to his car and extracted a weapon he crafted from the trunk, and gave it to the Prime Minister as a goodwill present.

The French PM returned with his entourage, pleased as a punch by the gift.

"Looks like everything went well." (Sae-Jin)

Watching the distancing cavalcade of limo and escort vehicles, two of them stood there, smiling in satisfaction.

And as they headed towards the parking lot while still carrying that smile, they heard a voice calling out to them.

"Oppa."

It was cold and hard, but a deeply familiar voice. Hazeline and Sae-Jin simultaneously turned around to look.

"...Sae-Jung?" (Sae-Jin)

It was Yu Sae-Jung. As if she had just left the Knights Order for the day, she was still wearing her Order uniform as she stood there, staring at the two. Her eyes as she alternated her gaze between them were indescribably cold.

"...You two seem to have gotten real friendly lately?" (Yu Sae-Jung)

"Oh, this is because of work..." (Sae-Jin)

"I already know that. The restaurant is owned by my family, after all. But I'm asking because you two seem really happy together, is all." (Yu Sae-Jung)

She walked in heavy footsteps, opened the passenger side door and climbed in first.

"Oppa, why aren't you getting in?" (Yu Sae-Jung)

At her chilly voice, Sae-Jin's body shook in fear, then he looked over at Hazeline. She too seemed deeply flustered as she pulled the hood over her head.

"Miss Hazeline, would you like to..." (Sae-Jin)

< Property of Fantasy-Books.live | outside of it, it is stolen.

"Nope. I, I'm going home alone. It's fine, fine. It's not that far, anyhow." (Hazeline)

"Huh? No, wait a second..." (Sae-Jin)

"I'm telling you, it's fine!! Everything's cool, so please, quickly go. Sae-Jung, take care." (Hazeline)

"...You too, Unni. Bye."

At Hazeline's fervent dissuasion, Sae-Jin had no choice but to enter the car and start the ignition.

Through the mirror, he could see her lonely back as she walked away.

CHAPTER 109

KING OF THE INFINITE OCEAN, LEVIATHAN (1)

Although the ignition was turned on, the car hadn't moved.

"...I'm fine with you two meeting up for work, but I also prefer if you don't get too familiar with her." (Yu Sae-Jung)

Sitting on the passenger side, Yu Sae-Jung spoke at the dawdling Sae-Jin. Unlike other times, her voice was chilly and hard. Sae-Jin didn't reply back.

"I'm Oppa's girlfriend, right? Don't I have the right to ask for things like this?" (Yu Sae-Jung)

Only then did he turn his gaze towards her. Within her wet eyes, he saw the reflection of his own heavy expression.

"You're right." (Sae-Jin)

He returned his gaze back to front and pressed the accelerator. They drove past Hazeline by the roadside, standing there and waiting for the light to change on the pedestrian crossing.

Yu Sae-Jung stared at the side of his face for a short while, before lowering her head and sighing out weakly, muttering out some words under her breath.

"...I'm sorry. But Oppa will understand if you were in my shoes..." (Yu Sae-Jung)

"..."

Without saying anything, he gently grasped her hand.

"This... is this Oppa taking action without words?" (Yu Sae-Jung)

She deliberately asked in a cheerful manner.

"...Yeah."

He answered her, albeit reluctantly.



November.

The eyes of the entire world had gathered on the Dawn Knights Order.

The reason was the Lycan's press conference.

Here, the number of people making quite a noisy scene easily exceeded the original capacity of 3000 for the Dawn Order's main auditorium that acted as the venue for the conference. These people were a disorganised collection of reporters, Knights and even Wizards, whose nationalities and species were hard to determine.

Also related to this conference, according to a certain memo/leaflet doing the rounds within the financial world as well as between the Knights Orders, there were quite a few speculations going on at the moment.

Some said, the Lycan was planning to reveal the true cause for all the Monster incidents happening of late; some posited that another Red Moon would pop up soon; or even, maybe that the Lycan was going to reveal himself to the public.

Most of the folks gathered here carried the opinion that the first option was likely the correct guess, while they waited for the arrival of the Lycan's spokesperson.

"Hyung-nim, what do you think?" (Reporter 1)

"How should I know? Don't talk to me. I need to make a call to the director..." (Reporter 2)

"It's plenty chaotic here without me talking to you... Ah!! He's here!!" (Reporter 1)

For a short length of time, a quiet stillness visited the noisy auditorium buzzing with anticipation. When the front door to the stage opened, the main character of today's gathering walked in, a steady rhythm of his shoes hitting the ground echoing in the hall.

Kim Sae-Jin.

Carrying a mannerism and a facial expression of a man intimately familiar with the proceedings, Sae-Jin climbed up to the lectern and stared at the camera lenses.

At the same time, countless camera flashes went off, but he didn't even blink once. Seeing how relaxed he appeared, several women started blushing for some reason.

Just as the explosion of camera flashes lessened, Sae-Jin began speaking the issue at hand.

Initially, he presented a set of an easily-digestible data, designed to hopefully make the listeners place a bit more of their faith and trust in the seemingly-baseless words that were soon to follow. Things such as the density of Mana increasing drastically within the Monster field, as well as the increasing frequency of Boss-level Monsters being spotted around world, etc, etc.

“But what does all of that got to do with the Lycan?” (Reporter)

One of the reporters asked out aloud. Kim Sae-Jin lightly nodded his head once, and then, finally spoke out the contents of Kim Yu-Sohn's dream/vision, disguised as the Lycan's prediction.

The Republic of Korea as well as the world, turning into hell on earth after appearances of countless Boss-level Monsters – in this terrifying future, the devastated landscape had transformed into a playground of Monsters, and mankind were nothing more than snack for them.

When his presentation concluded, there was only silence remaining in the auditorium. What the Lycan had put forth was the ‘end of the world’. Even if he was the one who correctly predicted the advent of Red Moon, this was still a difficult notion to accept.

“...Please, you need to believe him.” (Sae-Jin)

All Sae-Jin could do now, was to say those words and leave the stage.

In reality, he had nothing left to say anyways. There was no more data compiled and no evidence to back up the claim, either.

The loud, roaring questions flew towards the departing Sae-Jin's back, but he didn't answer any one of them, simply choosing to exit the auditorium.

And later that day, the Korean peninsula exploded, figuratively speaking, of course.



Almost every TV station and internet forum tried to dissect Sae-Jin's press conference. Some of them treated him as a pure nutcase; others said that it was quite a reasonable, rational prediction based on reality.

However – all those opinions, criticisms and insults had to stop, a week after the conference.

That was because, on the safest location within the Monster field, and less than three months after the appearance of the Boss-level Monster bird, another Boss-level Monster called the Flesh Golem had made its unwelcome appearance there.

A creature crafted entirely by combining flesh of numerous Monsters and people; its might was dependent on the number of ingredients used, and as such, was quite a formidable Monster to deal with.

And this particular Golem was over 70 metres tall and 34 metres wide. In order to fill up such a huge body with flesh, viscera and bones, one would need at least a thousand creatures, so there was no need to mention how obscenely powerful this Monster was.

Instinctively knowing only to walk forward and destroy everything standing in its way, the Flesh Golem moved its gigantic feet and stomped its way across the Monster field and headed towards a heavily populated city.

“...The estimated time of its arrival is 20 minutes.” (Kim Yu-Rin)

And naturally, the government and Knights hurriedly constructed a defense line to counter the threat.

Unfortunately for them, the Golem's speed was just too fast. Although almost 100 Knights with upper Mid Tier rank had gathered after the emergency callout orders were issued, they still lacked enough time to construct a proper line of defense.

“Can't we... receive the aid of the Hero Orcs again?” (Kim Yu-Rin)

Kim Yu-Rin cautiously asked her father, Kim Hyun-Seok. But he shook his head.

“Unlike the time with the Monster bird and the Red Moon, the route is too different. Understand that we are not going to receive their aid this time.” (Kim Hyun-Seok)

This Golem’s destination wasn’t Seoul but Busan. The Monster was ignoring the Mid Tier hunting ground and was cutting straight through the coastline within the High Tier ground. And that was also the reason why the line of defense was set up by the coast of the East Sea.

“...Understood.” (Kim Yu-Rin)

Kim Yu-Rin let out a sigh and nodded her head.

Kkieeeck!!

Right then, cries of a Griffin could be heard from the sky. Thinking that Monsters were attacking, stunned Knights quickly looked up.

Thankfully, although it was indeed a Monster, it also wasn’t an enemy. Mounted on the chest of the Griffin was the navy blue coloured crest of the Dawn Knights Order, and there was a Knight riding atop the flying creature.

It was the grand entrance of the famed ‘Griffin Rider’. It was such a cool appearance, almost every Knight gathered here, even the upper Mid Tier ones, threw undisguised looks of envy.

“...Both of them are from the Dawn.” (Kim Hyun-Seok)

Hearing her father’s bitter mumbling, Kim Yu-Rin could only scratch the back of her neck. It was true about the old saying, that seeing the rise of a rival made one’s stomach ache. No doubt, the Dawn Order would score big coverage worldwide, when the Boss raid proved to be successful and the resulting footage were broadcast to the public.

“Commander Kim Hyun-Seok, sir!!”

Soon after, Knights affiliated with the National Defense Force and tanks camouflaged in shades of green rolled up into the beach.

“What will be our plan of action here, sir?”

The man in charge of the military forces inquired hurriedly.

KKHUNG- KKHUNG-

As soon as those words left his mouth, the towering silhouette of the Flesh Golem could be seen in the distance, and the unsettling tremor from each stride it took could be felt underfoot as well.

“Firstly, lure the Monster onto the beach. Tanks will fire at the enemy once and retreat. They will only get in the way.” (Kim Hyun-Seok)

Kim Hyun-Seok laid down the order as he unsheathed the powerful sword ‘Gram’ that shone as brilliantly as the sun itself. Subordinate Knights nodded their heads and dispersed quickly.

“Is this your first battle with that sword, Master?” (Kim Yu-Rin)

Kim Yu-Rin too unsheathed her sword and asked.

“It is indeed so. However... I see that your sword is damaged slightly.”

“...Oh. Uh, yes, but as long as my Mana can easily enter it, it’s sufficiently good for me.”

“Ask him for a favour.” (Kim Hyun-Seok)

“Pardon?”

Kim Hyun-Seok used his sword to lightly tap hers and smiled.

“It may be a Branded Goods, but it’s already 30 years old now. It’s time to change it. Aren’t you a friend with Kim Sae-Jin?” (Kim Hyun-Seok)

“Ah... But, still...”

“Take a good look at my sword. See how brilliantly clear its shine is?”

“.....”

Was he trying to show off, even under this type of a situation? Kim Yu-Rin took a quick glance at her father and pouted deeply.

Regretfully, though – there wasn't a lot of time left for her to carry that pout around.

KKHUNG!! KKHUNG!!

The tremor became louder and harsher. And on the blurry silhouette of the gigantic Monster, a pair of blood-red eyeballs could be seen now.

SFX for whirling noise

On the cannons of the tanks, Mana began gathering like a whirlpool. Their aim was to intercept the Golem's relentless march.

At the same time, Every Knight present roused their Mana up – on their bodies, Mana Barriers strengthening their bodies and defenses, and on their weapons, auras matching the shapes of the various weapons they carried.

And so, the deadly battle began proper.



'A fierce battle will unfold on a beach nearby.'

As soon as Sae-Jin heard of the news, he thought this was the perfect opportunity to truly gauge the Leviathan Form's depth of power.

And also, maybe because it was a surprisingly docile creature that didn't take action unless its territory was breached, the threat of his ego being overtaken had not occurred once yet. Honestly, even with Athany Form having grown to such a size, he still hadn't encountered the threat of it encroaching on his consciousness at all.

He quickly crossed the Monster field in the Lycanthrope's appearance and quickly dived into the East Sea, transforming into the baby Leviathan. And while riding on the rough waves, he rapidly swam towards the site of the battle.

'...Wow, this body has gotten bigger now. Even the scales have changed colour.'

The size had grown to a point where it could at least rival the height of a middle schooler, while the previously-white scales had taken on a tinge of azure. When he looked at his own reflection on the water, the jaws seemed to have begun resembling a Leviathan a little bit more, in the way it protruded out slightly. Even the fangs seemed

to have gotten sharper as well.

‘As expected, staying in water makes the growth of this Form to accelerate.’

He caressed the undulating ocean waves and began to enjoy the impromptu bit of surfing.



When he arrived on the scene, he witnessed one hell of a fight unfolding over there.

No one could tell just where such an abomination came from, but regardless, it had to be acknowledged that the Flesh Golem was indeed a Chimera-like creature of marvel.

Kim Sae-Jin observed the battlefield from afar. Seeing the sword auras rising from 100 plus Knights over yonder, he could tell for sure that each and every one of them were people with unrivalled status.

But then, the Flesh Golem proved to be a difficult opponent as well.

Monsters fell from the giant Golems body – they were its clones, each of them carrying battle strength exceeding that of a regular Mid Tier Knight. On top of this, quite unlike the image it presented with its massive body, the Golem itself attacked with precisely controlled magic at the Wizards who were lending assistance towards the battle up front.

Sae-Jin fell into a dilemma, wondering what he should do next. He couldn't dare to use his 'Breath' in fear of hitting those Knights near the Golem, but to sit here and do nothing was just...

But soon enough, he came up with an idea.

Almost nothing was known about how the Leviathan of the legends attacked. People only knew that it could fire off a Breath, just like a dragon. But Sae-Jin thought it would be a regretful waste if he only relied on Breath, when he had a Skill that allowed him to manipulate the Element of Mana and water itself, affording him near-endless possibilities.

‘...I wonder, can I do it?’

For now, Sae-Jin fired a stream of water towards the Flesh Golem.

It was to ‘understand’ the make-up of the Golem using the Leviathan’s innate Trait.

The stream of water entered the Golem’s flesh, before exiting shortly after and flew back, landing on his scales.

That was the end of the reconnaissance. Although he didn’t have any ‘correct’ material to build himself a Flesh Golem, he still understood how to make *a Golem*.

And so, he began pouring his will into the ocean current. As soon as he did that, the water rose up as if a giant mountain was about to break out of its surface, and then...

A gigantic blue Golem twice the size of the Flesh Golem revealed itself to the world.

“...”

“...”

Immediately, heavy silence descended on the battlefield.

Not only the Knights, even the Flesh Golem too, stopped what they were doing and stared.

One would be hard pressed to find a situation where the words “absolutely overwhelming” be more apt than this very moment.

Its massive and impressive body reminded everyone witnessing it of the Titans from the folklores, and from those two blue ‘eyes’ looking down on the battlefield, an indescribable pressure emanated out, causing everyone to feel suffocated.

“That is... Oh, f*ck your mama.” (Unnamed Knight)

Not only one, but now there were two.

Was this the entrance of yet another Boss Monster? Several Knights were about fall down in utter despair, when...

WUOOOOONG

The Titan of the ocean swung its huge fist.

Knights hurriedly escaped from the vicinity, and almost right away, an incredible shock wave exploded out and seemingly swallowed up the whole world. Everyone's view was blocked by the torrents of sand and water drops crazily whirling around in the air. Even the branches of vegetation on the distant mountains broke off from the tremendous impact.

< Property of Fantasy-Books.live | outside of it, it is stolen.

“Listen up, take care of the injur...”

But when the dirty cloud of dust began settling down and their view became clearer – Knights couldn't help but fall into another bout of stunned confusion. No, it was more like their brains ceased functioning altogether. They just stood there, staring.

The huge fist of the Titan was currently pushing down on the head of the Flesh Golem and not the Knights.

“...What the hell is going on?!”

One of the Knights dazedly muttered, giving voice to the very thought everyone else was having at that moment.

CHAPTER 110

KING OF THE INFINITE OCEAN, LEVIATHAN (2)

Kkwahang!!

A destructive shock wave shook the earth, and the Titan's massive fist squashed the head of the Flesh Golem.

SFX for a low growl

As if it got stunned by the sudden attack from what it thought was a fellow Monster, the Flesh Golem let out a strange low-frequency groan and retreated a little.

Too bad, the blue Titan didn't give a rat's ass and threw yet another massive punch, this time aimed at the Golem's chest. Quite unlike the huge bulk that blocked out the sky, its movement was rather stylish to behold.

KKHUOOOONG!!!!

The Flesh Golem crossed its arm to block the incoming attack, but still suffered a grievous injury, one of its arms separating from the body. Angered by the immense pain, the Golem let out a roar half filled with rage and the other half with agony, and dashed towards the blue Titan.

Now that it lost pretty much all its reasoning, it no longer displayed that deft application of magic and clones anymore. It just went for the midriff of the Titan and tackled it to the ground.

SPLASH!!!

Falling into the East Sea, the Flesh Golem struggled in the water, but still swung its fist at the Titan. But well, the shift into a new battle ground presented a big problem for the Monster.

The 'fuel' for the Leviathan's Titan was water of the ocean. In other words, it would never be defeated as long as it was in a body of water.

SFX for expansive swings of a large fist

The Flesh Golem's violent punches constantly landed on the body of its target, but the blue Titan didn't even try to defend itself. No, it simply counterattacked while letting the hits in.

From the apocalyptic throwdown of two giant Monsters, sparks of Mana flew away like shooting stars.

The battle slowly tilted towards the blue Titan's favour as time passed. The flesh of the Flesh Golem continuously fell off, yet the Titan's wounds were recovering constantly by all that sea water surrounding it.

'I'm getting dizzy here.'

However, there was that thing about Mana of the summoner who brought forth the Titan, Kim Sae-Jin, constantly decreasing at an alarming rate. Thankfully, though – the Leviathan Form possessed a Mana reserve tens of times larger than his regular 'human' appearance, so he wasn't too worried about that for now.

Kkwahang!!

Pher-uhng!!

Following a large and disturbing sound of explosion coming from the punches of two Giants landing successfully, a piece of flesh stripped off the Flesh Golem and caused large ripples of water to splash all around.

None of the Knights witnessing this by the beach dared to intrude upon this battle; meanwhile, drones belonging to Knights Orders and media corporations buzzed away in the air, redirecting their camera lenses towards the giants.

Kkhuong! Kkhwang! Kkhuong! Kkwang!

Although most of the drones had their wings and lenses damaged by the massive shock waves generated by the relentless and chaotic battle for supremacy happening right before them, a few still managed to endure and capture the resulting footage.

"What the hell is going on here...?"

“Damn... Am I dreaming or something?”

Knights stared dazedly at this unexplainable situation for the next three minutes, before finally realising why they were there in the first place, which helped them regain their focus. Regardless of what was happening, that blue Titan was their ally. So, it made sense to work together and destroy that grotesque Golem...

“Everyone, charge!!”

Kim Hyun-Seok cried out and dashed forward.

SFX for energy-something-something shooting out

From his sword Gram, a powerful fireball shot out and inflicted a deep wound on the Flesh Golem’s arm. The Golem roared at the top of its lungs in unbridled rage, but the Titan didn’t miss its chance and thrust forward its massive blue fist into the Golem’s open mouth.

KKWAJEEK!!!!

The fist connected so splendidly, the Golem’s mouth almost came loose.

Towards the tottering Flesh Golem, countless Knights rushed in and swung their weapons. Sharp, focused Mana encased each and every one of those weapons, creating different silhouettes of weapon auras as the Golem’s body gradually became the proverbial Swiss cheese...



SFX for a painful moan of a Monster

Thanks to the unexpected alliance of the blue Titan and the Knights, the Flesh Golem issued a sorrowful wail as it crumbled into a heap of disgusting pieces. However, although this battle had come to an end, Knights couldn’t really relax at all. Would this Titan now turn its unwelcome attention towards them and attack?

Well, such a worry proved to be a needless worry. The blue Titan dissolved into several streams of water and disappeared into the sea altogether.

And when the Titan suddenly vanished, Knights quickly followed the strands of Mana

leaving from the ‘remains’ of the Titan.

And sure enough, on the surface of the undulating sea over yonder, there was a single creature.

Its entire body was covered in pale azure scales, and its eyes were unfathomably deep as if to demonstrate its intelligence.

Unlike its adorable countenance, the aura this mysterious creature exuded was undeniably noble – so much so, it proved impossible to stick whatever careless adjective one could think of to this being.

“What is that?”

Knights murmured to themselves and carefully studied its appearance. But, as if it was feeling shy from all the attention pouring on it, it immediately dived under the water’s surface and disappeared from the view.

“...The battle has ended. Mop up the remains of the Golem.”

It was then, Kim Hyun-Seok’s energetic voice resounded. Pretty much every Knight here was pooped out from fatigue, but still had to move their weary bodies since the superior officer issued an order.



The subjugation of the Flesh Golem unexpectedly ended with very low casualties.

And the footage containing the very reason for that – the handiwork of the Leviathan – spread out like wildfire the following day. However, since no one really knew about how the baby version of Leviathan looked like, the world took to calling it the ‘Unidentified Lifeform’ and emphasized the fact that it played the crucial role in defeating the Flesh Golem.

Of course...

“Judging from those shiny scales and deep, clear eyes, it could very well be a Leviathan.”

...There were a few experts who posited as so.

Unfortunately, these experts were actually scholars focusing on the field of history and folklore, so 'real' experts related to all things Monsters summarily laughed them out of the room, berating them for their baseless assumptions.

The Leviathan was the world's laziest – and because of that, relatively safe – beast of legends. Plus, its normal territory was located in deep oceans, so it was argued that there was no way it would roam around the coastline of the East Sea.

"Could it be a Divine Beast?" (Yu Sae-Jung)

And currently, the armchair expert operating out of Kim Sae-Jin's home, Yu Sae-Jung, took a look at this and that on the Dawn's official forum using her phone before spinning out her own interesting theory.

"Mm?"

"I'm saying, a Divine Beast. Remember that Black Turtle living near China not too long ago? And people keep saying that the Azure Dragon and the Leviathan have broadly similar set of abilities, the only difference being their names, you know."

"...So you're saying this creature is THE Azure Dragon of the East?"

Dumbfounded, Sae-Jin pointed towards the face of the baby Leviathan, which kind of resembled a puppy no matter how one cut it. Right up until then, even he was impressed by how cute it looked in the photo.

"Yep. But I'm not the only one with that opinion right now. A few Dawn Order Knights are thinking like this already."

"...Gimme that. Let me see." (Sae-Jin)

Yu Sae-Jung was telling the truth. The Dawn's official forum was filled with 'Azure Dragon' this and 'Azure Dragon' that. He thought that the Dawn was filled with best of the best, but now... Now, he realised they too possessed capacity to spout unfounded rubbish.

"See? What did I tell you? But still, it feels like all these huge things happen only in Korea lately. There are the Hero Orcs on land, and in the sea, we got a bona fide Azure Dragon now... Ah!! Right, right!! Look, the Azure Dragon supposedly guards the eastern direction, right? The East Sea is to the east..." (Yu Sae-Jung)

“It’s not like that, so you can tell them to stop with this nonsense.”

“...What the?! How does Oppa know that for sure?” (Yu Sae-Jung)

“...”

Since he couldn’t say “It’s me, so I’m pretty sure about it”, Sae-Jin just let out a fake cough and gave the phone back to her.

But when Yu Sae-Jung got her phone back, she quickly studied his mood for a bit, before asking him in an obviously manufactured leisure.

“...Op, Oppa should give me your phone too.”

“Mine? Why?”

“Ju, just give it to me. Oppa also took mine just now, so this is fair.”

“...”

Although her logic didn’t quite sound right, Sae-Jin didn’t argue and gave her his phone. She quickly snatched it off his hands, and as if afraid of having her activity seen, she brought the phone right in front of her eyes and hurriedly moved her fingers.

And about three minutes passed like that. After confirming that he hadn’t made any suspicious contact with Hazeline, she let out a relieved sigh, chuckled the phone on top of the dining room table and dived into his arms.

“Oppa always grumbles like an old man, but still ends up doing everything I ask of you~.”

“...What are you talking about?”

“No, well... It’s nothing, really.”

She spoke hard to understand words while unbuttoning Sae-Jin’s shirt.



Exactly one week passed since the subjugation. And the situation became exactly as Yu Sae-Jung had predicted.

The baby Leviathan had morphed into the baby Azure Dragon of the East instead, and the 'world' raised a huge fuss, saying that the Azure Dragon would become the guardian of the East Sea.

Hell, even the government got suckered into this popular opinion and believed it. They were currently in the middle of combing the entirety of the East Sea for the evidence of this baby Dragon that would no doubt become a huge asset to the national security in the future.

"How are you handling Rahaimde so far?"

Ignoring all these chaos, Kim Sae-Jin went to visit Kim Yu-Sohn. The veteran mercenary's complexion had become a lot worse than before.

"We're taking a good care of him... Kehuem. The ploy of using special pharmaceuticals to control him is also progressing favourably as well... It won't be long before we are able to extract all the information we need. But besides all that..."

Kim Yu-Sohn tapped the top of his desk, and a hologram projection rose up. And in this projection, a web page of a Cafe named 'The Deity of Four Directions, Azure Dragon'.

"...What will you do about this, sir?" (Kim Yu-Sohn)

"Ah, this, well... uh..." (Sae-Jin)

"In my opinion, I think this is a good development, sir."

Before Sae-Jin could finish, Kim Yu-Sohn stepped in the middle.

"This is good?" (Sae-Jin)

"Yes, sir. Without a doubt, the frequency of Boss Monsters appearing will only increase from now on – but if there is a being that can give rise to hope to our allies and instill despair in the hearts of the enemies, then that's all for the better, I believe. More

importantly, as a Leviathan, you can easily fight against any Boss-level Monsters alone, so you will become a great pillar of strength for this world.”

“...”

Kim Sae-Jin wordlessly scratched the back of his neck after seeing how ardent and fervent Kim Yu-Sohn seemed to appear. After all, wasn't this... like a formation of a Suicide Squad to keep the end of the world at bay or something?

“Ah, well, that...” (Sae-Jin)

“Also, truth be told, it was my idea to create this Cafe. Of course, if you, the Guild Master, wishes it, I will reveal to the world that it's not an Azure Dragon but a Leviathan, instead.”

“Huh?! No, wait, but why...” (Sae-Jin)

At this sudden confession, Sae-Jin's eyes went extra round.

“Your abilities are indeed truly an incredible thing, Guild Master. The Leviathan is a Monster that possesses divinity, and so, if you can continue to appear as one and learn to utilise its powers in full, then this old man will not have any more wishes left.”

The eyes of the strangely urgent Kim Yu-Sohn were not only filled with his desperation, but streams of blood as well. Kim Sae-Jin couldn't say *I can't do it* to the face of a man who looked like he might vomit blood any time now.

“...Yes. Well, uh... My parents seemed to have been fighting them, so... I should do the same, too. But forget about that for a second, and please drink this. There is blood pooling in your eyes.”

Sae-Jin reluctantly replied and handed a potion over to Kim Yu-Sohn. It was a high grade potion that one couldn't even buy in the market even if one wanted to.

“Huhuhuh... Thank you.”

Kim Yu-Sohn made a somewhat relieved and leisurely smile as he received the potion.



After finishing up the meeting with Kim Yu-Sohn, Sae-Jin headed to the Guild's training facility as usual to train, only to find an unexpected guest waiting for him there.

"Ah, you finally came, Mister Kim Sae-Jin."

It was Kim Yu-Rin. She was smiling at him while carrying various items on both of her hands.

"What are all those?" (Sae-Jin)

"It felt wrong to come with empty hands so I brought along some stuff." (Kim Yu-Rin)

"...You mean, all of them?"

"Yes. It's nothing much. It's just some electronic items, a wrist watch, and a wallet, and..." (Kim Yu-Rin)

Sae-Jin tilted his head slightly, but he still took the gift packages and placed them down on the table in the lounge.

"But, why did you go to all this trouble, Miss Yu-Rin? Is there a favour you'd like to ask me for?"

"Ah? Oh, uh... a favour, you say... I don't particularly have one, but... the thing is..." (Kim Yu-Rin)

She began contorting her face to form an unnatural smile while slightly shaking her hips.

...Why is she trying to dance provocatively all of a sudden?!

Sae-Jin's face reddened slightly, before belatedly spotting a sword tied to her hips. She didn't have a scabbard to hide it, and even with a single glance, he could tell that it was chipped pretty noticeably and didn't look all that threatening anymore.

"Looks like your weapon's durability has fallen greatly?" (Sae-Jin)

"Ah... You think so? Ah!! But what happened to my scabbard?!"

Although her acting needed a lot of work, Sae-Jin did find her attempt quite funny, so he grinned slightly and opened his mouth.

“There’s no need to beat around the bush, Miss Yu-Rin. I’ll help you. I’ll even give you a discount as well.”

“R, really? In that case, I...”

“4.5 million dollars. Of course, you don’t have to worry about its resulting quality. I’ll definitely craft a weapon that’ll rank in the top 3 of the Branded Goods rankings.” (Sae-Jin)

“...Fou, four point five...”

Watching Kim Yu-Rin’s face gradually lose colour, Sae-Jin couldn’t hold it and began chuckling out loudly.

“Yes. I can’t go any lower than that, I’m afraid.” (Sae-Jin)

“Ah, yes. I, I also am p, p, prepared, as well.”

Kim Yu-Rin swallowed her saliva noisily and nodded her head.

Actually, though, her real reason for this visit wasn’t just about her weapon. There was something else far more important. Something she just had to find out. She even spent one whole night staying up, researching and worrying about this thing...

“By the way... Mister Sae-Jin, besides all that...”

At her voice suddenly becoming razor-sharp, Sae-Jin’s shoulders trembled slightly.

“Yes?”

“Would you... like to spar with me for a little bit?”

CHAPTER 111

KING OF THE INFINITE OCEAN, LEVIATHAN (3)

“A spar? Why, all of a sudden...” (Sae-Jin)

Kim Sae-Jin backpedalled. However, Kim Yu-Rin took a quick step forward and got closer to him.

“Although I did give you my assessment before, I’ve never really fought you with my utmost yet.” (Kim Yu-Rin)

“I, uh...”

“Eiii, don’t be like that and let’s do this thing once and for all.” (Kim Yu-Rin)

Sae-Jin took a quick glance at the clock. It hadn’t even been ten minutes since he arrived at the training facility, and on top of that, he was decked out in training suit as well so, to go home now was just a bit...

“C’mom now, let’s do this~.” (Kim Yu-Rin)

Kim Yu-Rin showed off *aegyo* which was quite unlike her, while she dragged the helpless Sae-Jin to the middle of the training facility.

While still carrying an unsure expression, Sae-Jin went to pick the practice sword, but Kim Yu-Rin shook her head in disapproval and handed him a mace, instead.

“Look, here’s a mace you can use. You wielded it so well back then.” (Kim Yu-Rin)

“Huh?”

Still carrying that smile of hers, she forcibly squeezed the mace into his hands.

“...” (Sae-Jin)

He looked at the mace and fell into a thought.

Kim Yu-Rin was definitely suspecting something. Every single action he takes from

here on could flame her suspicions even more...

Before he could organise his thoughts properly, Kim Yu-Rin approached him like a bolt of lightning and swung her sword down. She didn't load the weapon with Mana, but the power and accuracy displayed were still incredible, so Sae-Jin had to put all his effort to swing the mace and defend himself.

That sudden burst signaled the beginning of the duel between a mace and a sword.



Sae-Jin put just over a half of what he was really capable of during this sparring session. But it proved impossible to completely mask all those little habits that his body had accumulated over time, and now, Kim Yu-Rin was sitting on a chair, seriously pondering about something while her frown deepened further.

“Fuu-oo...”

She spat out a sigh. Truly, she felt that there were parts that resembled the Hero Orc. Definitely so...

Did that mean Kim Sae-Jin studied under the Hero Orc? Well, he did say something about him being friendly with a subordinate of the Orc. But remembering back to those times when she went to the Orc village, she couldn't recall ever seeing any traces of him there...

‘Maybe?’

She looked at Sae-Jin who was stretching his limbs at that moment. Monsters that could change into humans were very rare, but they existed for sure. Called the ‘Monster Man’, she even personally hunted one before.

But Kim Sae-Jin definitely wasn't like that. Looking at his history, no one could argue that he was a Monster in disguise.

In that case... maybe, it was the opposite? In other words, ‘a human that could change into a Monster’...And, there was certainly one ability blessed onto the human race that could make such a thing plausible – the ‘Trait’.

“Mister Kim Sae-Jin?”

Kim Yu-Rin cautiously called out to him.

“Yes?” (Sae-Jin)

“Uhm, if it’s not too much trouble... can I ask what your Trait is?” (Kim Yu-Rin)

“My Trait?”

“Ah, well... Yes. But if you feel uncomfortable talking about, then you don’t have to tell me.” (Kim Yu-Rin)

“Really? In that case, I won’t tell you. It’s a taboo, after all.” (Sae-Jin)

Kim Sae-Jin made his displeasure known and bounced out of the training facility in hurried steps.

“Eh...?”

Kim Yu-Rin stared at his back in a dumbfounded daze.



Chilly winds were blowing now, and some regions had already welcomed early signs of snow with warm smiles. The sights of people walking around wearing thick padding could be seen, and stores selling scarfs and gloves increased in numbers.

The arrival of a new season seemed to possess the power to bring forth such changes to the scenery.

“I hear that Portugal is on the brink... Won’t the world really come to end at this rate?”

“Eiii, c’mon now.”

The conversations taking place on the streets were fused with the seasonal Wintery chill. Just over a month had passed since that earth-shaking press conference, and chaos had truly visited the world.

The total number of Monsters were increasing explosively, and Boss-level Monsters constantly popped up. As if the Monster bird incident of Korea was just the beginning, stronger and scarier Monsters turned the world upside down.

The situation had worsened so much, it became no longer possible to maintain a functioning government in regions that fell behind in terms of forming an acceptable defense against Monster threats as well on the development of Knights Orders – regions such as Southeast Asia and the continent of Africa. This triggered an unprecedented refugee crisis and thus became another big worldwide issue.

However, from that incident with the Monster bird, and to the recent Flesh Golem, the Republic of Korea suffered little damage to itself while it fought off those threats when compared to other nations.

And one of the reasons for this was, unlike others, all because of a certain mysterious supernatural force.

The Leviathan. A being that the world took to calling as the Azure Dragon.

“...But something is strange.” (Sae-Jin)

Kim Sae-Jin quietly muttered to himself as he read the words off the pages of ‘A Deity of Four Directions, Azure Dragon’. Quite different from the name that sounded like a swindler’s operation, the website itself was thoroughly well designed and laid out.

The Azure Dragon-related notifications, open forums, noticeboards, etc, etc... The simple but luxuriously decorated site didn’t have much traffic, but at the same time, it seemed that there were a few dedicated individuals keeping things going steadily as well.

“It’s like the site is in a sleep mode, but still, the Azure Dragon is fast becoming the guardian entity of the Korean peninsula.” (Kim Sun-Ho)

Kim Sun-Ho replied with an energetic voice. Sae-Jin came to see Kim Yu-Sohn, but the illness of the old man had flared up and so, he was having a meeting with his son, Sun-Ho, instead.

“Okay, fine. But... just how are you planning to utilise this Cafe?” (Sae-Jin)

“Ah, about that. So, I’ve got this idea – how about we do it like this, sir? There is this old movie called the ‘Spider-M*n’, you see, and in it, it uses roughly the same idea as mine...”

Kim Sun-Ho continued with his words in a somewhat happy voice.

His suggestion was rather simple.

The owners of the website were Kim Sun-Ho, Kim Sae-Jin and Kim Yu-Sohn. And among them, Sae-Jin was the Leviathan. And so... Sae-Jin would 'inform' them of the next place where the Leviathan was going to appear, and that info would pop up on this website.

Through this method, which implied that this website was in some sort of communication with the Azure Dragon, it would earn a huge amount of fame and people's trust. And they would be able to instil the idea of the Leviathan – or in this case, the Azure Dragon – being the ally of humanity.

"...However, when looking at the big picture, isn't that fraud?" (Sae-Jin)

"Pardon? Well, that, uh, well... No, it likely isn't. It'll probably be okay, as long as we are not found out, Guild Master." (Kim Sun-Ho)

This whole thing about not getting found out didn't sound *kosher*, so Sae-Jin narrowed his eyes and glared at Kim Sun-Ho.

"W, well, if such a thing is a fraud, then, uh, acting as the Lycan, the Guild Master would end up serving multiple life senten... Oh. Sorry." (Kim Sun-Ho)

Kim Sun-Ho hurriedly tried to come up with an excuse, before lowering his head and scratched the back of his neck.

Sae-Jin looked at him and chuckled slightly. Although Kim Sun-Ho seemed to be scared of his boss in the beginning, it was as if he had gotten a lot more comfortable now and his attitude had lightened up. Sae-Jin preferred this, as it was like dealing with a friend.

Also, Sae-Jin didn't expect to see the father of a child to be so immature as well, either.

"Anyhow. I've already uploaded the coordinates where you will be for today. Of course, no one will believe us now, but I already called up a friendly news network, so... I'm pretty certain that they will send someone over." (Kim Sun-Ho)

Sae-Jin nodded his head. But then, Kim Sun-Ho's expression hardened suddenly.

"Ah, also, it seems like that Bathory woman is showing signs of movement, Master." (Kim Sun-Ho)

“...She is?”

“Yes sir. Not sure what’s gotten into her, but for someone who doesn’t want to breathe the same air as humans, she’s been seen walking around the outside quite a lot lately. But what’s odd about her behaviour is... that she’s been seen wandering around the coastline. Looks like she is thinking about the Azure Dragon, Guild Master.”

“In that case... if I’m lucky, I might get to meet her, then?” (Sae-Jin)

Sae-Jin’s eyes shone brightly. As long as Leviathan was not on solid ground, it was basically invincible within the ocean. After all, the ocean was like an infinite source of Mana to him.

“...No, Guild Master, if you are ‘unlucky’, then you’ll get to meet her.”

However, Kim Sun-Ho’s rebuttal was rather blunt.

“What do you mean?”

“It’s still too difficult against the Bathory woman, sir. She alone brutally slaughtered dozens of Highest Tier Knights back when the war between races was still a thing. Even with the Leviathan Form, as a baby, you’re asking for the impossible.” (Kim Sun-Ho)

“...She’s that powerful?”

Currently, his Leviathan Form was strong enough to fight against the Flesh Golem, albeit by using a special technique. But even that was not enough to stand up against this Bathory woman?

“That’s correct, sir. The descendants of the Bathory family enjoy this unique Trait passed down genetically where, by paying the price of fellow Vampires’ lives, they become much more powerful than before. Not sure how that works, but well, that weird story about ‘Bathory bathing in blood’? That story came about because of this Trait, sir.”

Kim Sae-Jin understood then.

Back then, the number of Vampires who died during the war between the races easily went past a hundred thousand worldwide.



After ending the meeting with Kim Sun-Ho, Sae-Jin changed into the Leviathan and swam in the East Sea.

Currently, even at a casual glance, his length and weight had blown up at a crazy rate. He only swam in the East Sea three times a week, but still... It seemed that his growth accelerated due to him using this Form's abilities rather vigorously of late.

Most importantly, though – he still hadn't felt the dangers of his ego being overtaken by the creature's instincts, not like with the Orc or the Lycanthrope.

This led to Sae-Jin questioning the veracity of the widely understood "nature" of the Leviathan that people accepted as fact. He even thought that maybe, this powerful creature of the ocean wasn't a Monster, but a being sitting on a higher plain of existence than mere humans.

They said the Leviathan would turn violent when its territory was breached, but... well, wouldn't humans do the same too, under the circumstances? There was no creature alive that allowed others to freely break into their homes, after all.

"There it is!!"

Hearing the voices coming from afar, Sae-Jin quickly assumed a serious facial expression and corrected his posture. The appearance of a baby Leviathan being pushed around by the waves had suddenly transformed into an omnipotent deity.

"Be quiet. Carefully take its photos. Easy, easy."

The camera lens pointing towards him was located on top of a yacht. In other words, there was a boat carrying people in this dangerous part of the East Sea. If it was in the past, this would've never happened in a million years – they probably had to cross areas filled with sea Monsters to get here.

"Well, everyone. There it is, the Azure Dragon. Looks like it has grown in size a little, but it still exudes that noble and unwavering aura..."

A reporter whispered to the other passengers. Sae-Jin glanced at the label stuck on the camera. They were from the station KNS – a friendly broadcaster, the one Kim Yu-Sohn secretly gave a heads-up to, as a thank you for all the favourable articles written about

The Monster Guild.

“Now, the East Sea trade route has been stabilised thanks to the influence of the Azure Dragon. All the regular sea Monsters as well as the flying Monsters previously found near here are busy migrating away from the East Sea, after being thoroughly suppressed by the Dragon’s presence. Right now, the economic value added to the country because of the Azure Dragon cleaning up this region has been calculated to easily exceed \$1 billion...”

Of course, not all ocean-bound Monsters ran away. Every now and then, an aggressive sea Monster did appear and challenged him.

...Just like now.

“Eu-hurk!!”

The yacht began swaying uncontrollably as the heavy waves rose up all of a sudden. At the same time, darkness seemed to descend on the world, and a Monster revealed its ugly mug from under the water’s surface.

Red eyes and horrifying fangs jutting out from its maws – it was a Monster called ‘Ness’, the dominant creature of this area, before the Leviathan showed up.

“That, that, that...” (Someone from the yacht)

As expected, it became a state of full-on panic on the yacht. The escort Knights belatedly unsheathed their weapons, but everyone knew very well that no Knight could defeat a sea Monster when on the sea. The reporter looked at the Leviathan with a pair of pleading eyes.

“...Keuheung.”

Kim Sae-Jin the baby Leviathan snorted dismissively, and slowly moved his body. The Ness Monster growled and expelled Mana in a threatening manner, but well, it was all kind of laughable, really.

He was planning to use his Breath and easily blow the creature away, but then, he thought about the camera. It was true that one wanted to show off a bit if there was an appreciative audience watching the action.

He thought for a bit on what he should do, before a good idea popped in his brain. He then quickly poured his Mana into the ocean.

SFX for a sudden gust of heavy winds

Violent winds suddenly whipped up like a thunderstorm and shook the sky, and on the body of water where the Ness was swimming, the ocean began to split open. And after all that mass of water parted away as if a world of vacuum had formed there, the previously-hidden main body of the Ness was dramatically revealed to the world.

Unfortunately for the Monster, the sea water was basically its life. The Ness desperately pedalled its limbs in the air where there was not a drop of water as it began drying up from the tip of its tail, until finally, even the red light circulating in its eyes dissipated away.

This should be enough, then.

Kim Sae-Jin returned the violent storm of winds and the massively-split ocean back to their original calm state, and then took a quick glance at the yacht. Even while experiencing events exceeding his wildest imaginations, the cameraman showed off his true professionalism and continued to film everything away.

“Uh...”

Inside the minds of these folks, who were all dazedly staring at the baby ‘Azure Dragon’, this creature had become even more wondrous to behold.

To split open the sea like that... they had read that before – but, that was from the Bible. And more importantly, the one who performed that miracle was the omnipotent ‘God’.

“...”

Sae-Jin took one more glance at the dazed group of people, before diving deep into the water. He was going to absorb the Ness’s Mana Crystal.

[Overall Growth: 10% achieved]

- Acquired the Skill ‘Ness’s Evil Eye’. Lifeforms coming in contact with the Sea Monster’s glare will be unable to move for a short period of time. Divine Creatures will be unaffected by this Skill.
- This Skill can only be used during the Sea Monster Form.

Although it was an alert window he hadn’t seen in a long while, rather than feeling happy, Sae-Jin found himself utterly stunned at its contents.

‘...This is only 10%?!’

To think that such an overwhelming strength was only 10% of its true might... Sae-Jin couldn’t help but praise the greatness of the Leviathan.

CHAPTER 112

KING OF THE INFINITE OCEAN, LEVIATHAN (4)

A certain video footage was being played inside the editing suite of a media company called “Guk-Nyeom Daily”.

In it, one could see an Azure Dragon yawning and stretching its limbs while floating on top of the ocean surface when, all of a sudden, the sea Monster ‘Ness’ made its entrance.

It was one of East Sea’s most infamous Monsters. Facing the provocation of this Ness, Azure Dragon began radiating charm filled with wondrous leisure outward.

And when the adorable Azure Dragon opened its eyes wide open and glared, the sea containing the Ness split completely apart, just like how Moses split the Red Sea.

In the end, Ness couldn’t even do anything and died a death of drying up like a jerky and then, the Azure Dragon triumphantly dived under the water’s surface.

“...Holy cow. This is some serious sh*t. PD Kim, how the hell did you capture this footage?!”

Thanks to the power of this massive, exclusive scoop, even the Chief Director of the Guk-Nyeom Daily, Park Jung-Hyuk, had to make his way to the editing suite. Maintaining a slim smile, PD Kim Hyun-Jeh did his best to rein in his overflowing pride and tried to appear as humble as possible.

“We had received a call from the Monster Mercenary Company. A notice of the Azure Dragon’s potential appearance had popped up in a website called ‘A Deity of Four Directions, Azure Dragon’ and they wanted us to verify the veracity of that claim.”

“Heum... To verify, huh?”

“Yes, sir. I also thought it could be nothing more than some swindlers trying their luck, but since the Mercenary Company made the request, I had no choice but to check it out.”

Chief Director Park scratched his chin as he thought about something. If that Mercenary Company suddenly asked one of his men to verify the claims of a fishy-sounding website, then that could only mean... Well, they were doing things in a sort of 'roundabout way'.

"Okay, so who is the owner of that website? Don't tell me, it's also Mister Kim Sae-Jin?"

Director Park said as he began typing on the keyboard. On the screen of the editing room's computer, that video footage was replaced by the website 'A Deity of Four Directions, Azure Dragon'.

"They were denying it, but... I think it's quite likely. I mean, Kim Sae-Jin did say he could communicate with Monsters. And coincidentally, the ones to tip us off was the Monster Mercenary too, so..."

"Is that right? In that case... For now, keep everything to yourself. Our station has been surviving thanks to Mister Kim Sae-Jin, so don't you dare f*ck this one up."

'Guk-Nyeom Daily' was a big multi-media conglomerate that also owned the station 'KNS', but the truth was, it had been lagging behind their rivals due to experiencing numerous hardships and headwinds in the past.

However, from a certain point in time, things changed – beginning with The Monster Guild revealing important information through Guk-Nyeom only. And they even made an entertainment show which didn't seem all that promising on paper with Yu Sae-Jung, Joo Ji-Hyuk, Yi Hye-Rin as well as other famous members of the Guild. And now, they had become so intimate, that some were openly wondering if The Monster had acquired the media outlet or not.

And that led to the prestige of 'Guk-Nyeom' to naturally soar at a remarkable rate. At minimum, they no longer heard these damnable words: "KNS? Ah... Apologies, you guys are a bit..." from the agents of Knights and celebrities. No, in the case with Knights, their eyes gleamed dangerously as they actively tried to jump in with both their feet. After all, there was this shining backer called The Monster behind Guk-Nyeom now.

Director Park closed his eyes and began comparing the turbulent, difficult past and the good times of now, falling deeply into a state of pride at how things had turned out.

“Ah, by the way, PD Kim.”

Then, suddenly, he began glaring at PD Kim.

“Y, yes?”

“You are being rude, saying Kim Sae-Jin this and Kim Sae-Jin that. You better address him with a *ssi* at the end... No, you start calling him with a *nim* attached, understand? It’s now Kim Sae-Jin-*nim*. Got that? Even if he’s not around, you use the honorific. If you don’t, you might end up having a slip of a tongue during an interview or something.”

It seemed that ‘Kim Sae-Jin’ had already become a religion for Director Park.

“.....Ah. Yes, sir.”

PD Kim scratched the back of his neck and replied in a reluctant manner.

“Repeat after me. Kim Sae-Jin-*nim*, Kim Sae-Jin-*nim*, Kim Sae-Jin-*nim*...”



In the middle of the winter.

For the purpose of going out on a date, Sae-Jin brought Yu Sae-Jung along to the Monster Mercenary Company HQ.

Numerous modifications, new additions and repair works must have had some contributions here, because the Mercenary Company building not only failed to resemble a garden shed constructed out of plywood, it instead looked far more pristine, imposing, and impressive than a regular Knights Order’s HQ.

As expected of the world’s best Mercenary Company. As an aside, there were now more than 30 Mercenary Companies established around the world, making the title of the world’s best all that more meaningful.

“The infrastructure looks clean and well thought out.” (Sae-Jin)

Sae-Jin looked around the interior and showed his admiration. The lobby, the front counter, the board with jobs listed, etc, etc... what he saw here was a space that

perfectly blended the storied tradition of the freedom-loving Mercenaries and the cutting-edge technology of the present.

“Thank you. Well, after the story of how well designed our systems are, as well as superior benefits and bonuses we offer, current and former Knights are tripping over each other to register as our members.” (Kim Sun-Ho)

Kim Sun-Ho said, his voice overflowing with pride.

“Oh, really?” (Sae-Jin)

“Ng. Even within my Dawn Order, a handful of Knights stealthily submitted their papers to the Monster Mercenary Company. They initially denied doing it as if their lives were depending on it, but when they got admitted in, *poof*, they left, just like that. Did you know how speechless I was back then?” (Yu Sae-Jung)

Yu Sae-Jung replied in Sun-Ho’s stead with a slightly sour face.

“Hahaha... it’s true. In my opinion, I think the clincher is the no-cost artifact rental service the Company offers. Ah, since we are talking about that, would you like to go and take a look?” (Kim Sun-Ho)

The no-cost artifact rental service.

It was a service where various artifacts of TM (The Monster) Company, known for their intricate design and outstanding performance, were rented out for free. It was also perhaps one of the exclusive benefits the Monster Mercenary Company offered that all the other Knights Orders was envious of.

Mercenaries who worked for The Monster could rent out an artifact carefully crafted by the lead designer of the ‘Undisputed number one desired artifact brand as voted by the Knights’ TM for free. As an aside, the job title of ‘lead designer’ was coined by people not from the company – and that title belonged to none other than Kim Sae-Jin, of course.

“I’m also kinda curious. Oppa, can we go?” (Yu Sae-Jung)

“...Well, sure. Let’s go.” (Sae-Jin)

“Please, this way.” (Kim Sun-Ho)

Kim Sun-Ho assumed a bright smile and led the way.

The interior of the rental office, simply named 'Artifact Service', was definitely not simple at all. The incredibly massive safe and the state-of-the-art security systems seemed to possess a brutal ambiance and made one shrivel away just by their presence alone.

"Has there been any theft attempts?" (Sae-Jin)

"No, sir. This security system here is bulletproof." (Kim Sun-Ho)

"...Very good." (Sae-Jin)

Since there were quite a few number of people waiting to rent out artifacts inside the office, they couldn't stay for too long. They spent ten minutes there exploring, before leaving that place and headed to the break room.

"Wow, this place, looks way better than in the photos." (Yu Sae-Jung)

The break room, over 200 *pyeong* in size, was impressively kitted out, enough even for Yu Sae-Jung to show how pleasantly surprised she was – there were liquid refreshments and food available, and even facilities such as snookers and ten-pin bowling were installed here. (*TL: 1 pyeong = 3.3058 square metres*)

"I'm sure this is one break room that Knights of various Orders are most envious of. We're different from Knights Orders in that, our members are free to spend their time any way they like."

Kim Sae-Jin wrapped his arm around the shoulders of impressed Yu Sae-Jung and pulled her closer, before observing the activities of the Mercenaries with great interest.

"Hey, dude. Did you check this out yet? This 'A Deity of Four Directions, Azure Dragon' website?"

"Oh... you mean that crap about some fairy tale?"

In the middle of all that, Yu Sae-Jung overheard a conversation that tugged at her curiosity. She stopped in her tracks for a bit and eavesdropped on the two male Mercenaries.

“No, man. Really. Haven’t you seen the news? The site has predicted the location where the Azure Dragon was going to appear. And you know what, it was true...”

“It’s obviously a bull crap, so how can you believe in this sh*t?”

The number of visitors to the website ‘Azure Dragon’ had exploded as soon as its existence was mentioned on the television. Of course, since the site was ready for such an eventuality, the servers ably handled all the increased traffic. And so, the website had become really famous now. Still, a part of the population mocked others who believed in the site’s claims, calling it nothing but a fairy tale.

“It’s not bullsh*t. Didn’t you hear that rumour about Spain trying to get in touch with the site owners in official capacity? You know just how many sea Monsters are out there.”

“...Oh? So, who are the site owners, then?”

“How the hell should I know that? Some say, it’s definitely the Guild Master Kim Sae-Jin...”

It was then, a single alarm went off from the Mercenary Clock.

“Hey, hey, hey. Looks like the job rewards are finally in. Let’s go and get it.”

“Uh? Really? Let’s go, then. Next round is on the person with the lower...”

But when they stood up to leave, Kim Sae-Jin and Yu Sae-Jung were standing right behind them.

“.....”

“.....”

Both of them froze on the spot thanks to the unexpected entrance of these two people, who were basically, practically, figuratively speaking, their bosses.

“You should be on your way,” said Yu Sae-Jung.

The way she talked to Sae-Jin and when addressing other people were completely, utterly different. There was not a speck of emotion contained in her indifferent voice,

for the latter case.

“...”

Misunderstanding the cold tone of her voice, the two Mercenaries began wrecking their brains earnestly in order to remember what they had done wrong.

Unfortunately, there was one. They did allege that Sae-Jin was the owner of that website...

“We’re sorry.”

Two Mercenaries spoke in heavy voices and suddenly, knelt down on the ground.

“Huh? What are you doing all of a sudden...?”

Flustered, Sae-Jin and Yu Sae-Jung waved their hands around in panic and meanwhile, Kim Sun-Ho watched the proceedings, full of interest.



On the uppermost floor of a certain hotel.

Inside this darkly-decorated penthouse suite, a news programme was unexpectedly being shown on a giant TV screen.

– The Azure Dragon has helped people out today as well. The infamous Monster that attacked the filming crew of KNS, the Ness, was killed by the Dragon. This miraculous event was captured on film by the brave reporter of KNS...

“I wanna make that thing my pet. So, what do you think?” (Bathory)

At Bathory’s words, the Apostle lightly bit his lip.

He kind of expected this outcome, after seeing the appearance of that unknown lifeform. Bathory had this unexplainable thing of finding Monsters more adorable than actual people, after all.

“Ha, hahaha... Well, that is... We’re just a bit too swarmed with work, so at the moment... To tame such a Monster, we might end up committing away a lot of

resources, my lady..."

"..." (Bathory)

The Apostle did his best to beat around the bush, but Bathory's gaze that was sharper than the sharpest blade remained pointing at him.

"I know that. But well... I want it so much, so what can I do? Besides, that creature killed my Ness, too. So, don't you think it's only fair that that baby Monster takes over the empty spot of Ness in my life?" (Bathory)

Within the blood of Vampires, demonic energy flowed naturally. So, it was incredibly rare to see a Vampire getting attacked by Monsters.

Instead, more often than not, there were cases of them being rather friendly towards one another. Well, rather than being friendly, it was more like Vampires manipulating Monsters using their unique Seduction magic...

"Of course, what you said is hundreds time, thousands time, ten thousands times correct, but... that, that creature seems just too powerful to be fully tamed..."

"...Hey you, are you trying to diss me or something? It's easy for me, if it's only that strong. And on top of that, it's still a baby. No matter how resistant it is, beat it up real good a few times, and it won't fight back no more. Don't you think it will be useful once we tame it? And most of all..." (Bathory)

Bathory pointed at the 'kid' on the TV screen and licked her lips in a somewhat suspicious manner.

"Look how adorable it is. Look at it cocking its eyebrows to appear dignified!! I just wanna bite it so much!! Kkyah!"

'...It'll die if you bite it, though... '

The Apostle somehow was able to swallow back his retort.

He really felt like killing himself. Just how was he going to capture a creature that was being called the 'deity of the East Sea' and the 'king of infinite oceans'? It wasn't like Bathory herself was going to help anyway, either.

“Besides that, I’m pretty sure that even the Lord will like it. I mean, the Lord already owns four pet Monsters – a Basilisk, a Cerberus, and, and...”

– *You can find more information on the Azure Dragon in the website ‘A Deity of Four Directions, Azure Dragon’.*

Bathory’s head snapped towards the direction of the Apostle in an instant.

“You heard that, right?” (Bathory)

“Y, yes, my lady. This servant has heard it. But...”

“But what? Are you standing there waiting for your neck to fly off your body?”
(Bathory)

“Ah, tha, that is... No, uh...”

The Apostle stood there hesitantly, his face now nearly full of tears. But he hurriedly run out of the room after Bathory stomped down on the floor with her high heel.



Almost at the same time.

“Waaaaaahhh~~.”

Kim Sae-Jin was in the middle of realising just what a bear living in a zoo must’ve felt like. No matter what he did – literally anything – he could hear people raising cries of cheers from the side.

When he shook his tail and jumped into the water...

“Waaaaaahhh~~.”

...Shouts of joy rose up.

And when he opened his mouth wide and yawned...

“Waaahhhh~~.”

...Again, another shouts of joy.

When he floated there and did nothing but blink his eyes...

“Waaahh~~.”

...Even then, people cheered out.

‘Seriously, where the heck did this cruise show up from?’

Sae-Jin scratched the back of his neck with his front limb as he looked at the ship full of people that started to follow him around from some time ago.

“Waaahhh~~~.”

Just like before, another shouts of cheer.

‘...Uh-whew.’

Seeing the label ‘TM’ on the side of the ship, it seemed that Jo Hahn-Sung saw yet another opportunity and quickly started a new line of business as soon as the East Sea was cleared out, but...

“Fuu-woo.”

...They were beginning to annoy him. Sae-Jin the baby Leviathan let out a long sigh.

“Waaaahhh~~~.”

...And that was followed by yet another bout of cheering.

Hearing the same thing over and over again irritated him so much, so Sae-Jin spitefully spat out a stream of water.

SFX for a sound of water exploding in the air

The stream of water shooting up into the air spread open like an umbrella and showered down on the heads of everyone onboard the ship.

“Kkyaaah~~ Waaaahh~~.”

But instead of screaming, they rewarded his hard work with even louder cheering and laughter.

“That was a great show displayed by the guardian of the East Sea, the Azure Dragon~.”

The guide shouted out loudly. Just who could it be? When Sae-Jin took a glance... why, it was ‘Jo Hahn-Sung’, of course!!

Sae-Jin had entrusted him with very important work, but there he was, enjoying a holiday? Anger boiled in Sae-Jin’s mind suddenly, so he shot out a thin and long jet of water and smacked the back of Jo Hahn-Sung’s head.

“Aaaack!!”

Jo Hahn-Sung let out a big cry as he squatted down on the floor.

Satisfied, Sae-Jin let out a snort.

The people enjoying the cruise didn’t even care about Jo Hahn-Sung’s condition and continued to shower Sae-Jin with appreciation.

...As an aside, he learned later that Jo Hahn-Sung was actually on the ship that day because of work-related matters. All those onboard were potential future investors from the financial world, apparently.

CHAPTER 113

KING OF THE INFINITE OCEAN, LEVIATHAN (5)

Inside a cold and grey room, where not even a single ray of light could penetrate.

A lone woman, choosing to wear a thick black robe even indoors, was looking at the screen of her phone while sitting on a couch, while letting out a long sigh.

Two weeks. Two weeks, since the last time she chatted – or sent a text message to – with *that man*.

She thought about a lot of things in the meantime.

Unfortunately... the deeper her thoughts became, the more she wanted to *see* him.

Hazeline had always thought about him constantly before, but... The emotions of a person – no, an Elf – was a really crafty and cunning thing, indeed. She was fine with totally giving up because she couldn't see him, but then again, she also found it patently unfair that she was not allowed to see him.

“...That's Mister Sae-Jin, alright.”

Swearing out like a sailor on shore leave, and totally ruining the pristine images of commonly-accepted Elven personalities in the process, Hazeline finally stumbled across the article about the website 'A Deity of Four Directions, Azure Dragon'. The Hero Orc, the bipedal Wolf, the Goblin – and now, even the Azure Dragon. Seriously now... it seemed like there was nothing he couldn't change into.

“Should I go and see him...”

Apparently, there was a cruise package that, when lucky, could see the dragon in the flesh. Alternatively, since she was beset with a surplus of cash recently, she could go and buy herself a boat, what with the market for yachts going through something of a revival at the moment.

...Actually, she already had got herself a speedboat that ran on magic power. She heard that it was fast becoming a fashionable thing to own one among the Wizarding

community, so she got herself one. She also had driven it to those locations where the Azure Dragon was spotted previously.

Although he wasn't there, the cooling ocean breezes did help her unwind from all the stress that had been accumulating until now.

"Fuu... No, I shouldn't."

After completely accepting the fact that she had feelings for Kim Sae-Jin, she knew she had to step back and take stock of the situation.

She didn't want to do this. She felt frustrated. But in order to not repeat the mistake of the past, she had to stop. No matter how honest Elves were as well as how much emphasis they placed on their emotions, going at it twice was just too much for her. A relationship that shouldn't be, and that couldn't be, needed to stay within the realms of movies and TV dramas.

And that's what Hazeline had decided on. But before long, right there on her phone screen, it now showed a new post from Sae-Jin's SNS profile which was uploaded on 14th of January.

His smile as displayed on the screen was really open and bright, in an obvious contrast to her darkened room.



20th of January, the day of 'Daehahn', also known as the day the Winter would begin with a vengeance. (TL: "대/한" Basically means 'big/major cold' and denotes the coldest day in the year. Apparently. shrugs shoulders)

As usual, Kim Sae-Jin came out to the East Sea to swim, only to receive a phone call from Kim Sun-Ho unexpectedly.

"From the Chinese?" (Sae-Jin)

– "Yes sir. One of our Mercenaries who went for a job in China has found that there seems to be some kind of a rumbling over there to kidnap the Azure Dragon."

"Huh? Why would they do that? Have they lost their damn minds?"

Sae-Jin frowned deeply. Under the soles of his bare feet, sands of the Wintery beach stuck tenaciously; if he couldn't get to swim today, he was going to get quite cross.

– *“Well, it seems like the sentiment of the Azure Dragon belonging only to their cultural heritage has seen a surge in popularity. And not just the Chinese population, but even their government seems to think that way. Also, our government has apparently received a ‘polite’ request to lead the Azure Dragon away as well. Of course, the administration promptly refused to do so, saying that it’s a nonsensical request to begin with.”*

“What the fu... They even cooked and ate their own Black Turtle, so what the hell are they even thinking?”

The Black Turtle, a divine beast that used to live in China. But the Chinese government killed it, in order to solve the massive financial crisis they were facing at the time. According to their excuse, it was a Mercenary troupe that illegally carried out the deed, but... Well, there was just no way in hell that any sane country would leave alone a band of Mercenaries that had caused such a huge chaos.

– *“I know, right? Since we don’t know what’s going to happen, we changed what information can be accessed depending on the user’s level on the website... But still, be careful out there.”*

“I got it... But, you don’t have to worry about me. When out in the open sea, I’m pretty much invincible.”

From his experiences so far, there was no creature alive that could defeat a Leviathan within the oceanic environment.

Both Kim Yu-Sohn and his son, Sun-Ho, had stressed that Bathory was far more stronger... But because of the Leviathan’s pride, he found himself questioning that very idea. It was not that surprising, really – how often could one find a creature that easily solo-ed a Boss-level Monster?

– *“Still, I’m sure it’ll be better to keep your guard up, sir. By the way, are you planning to swim today as well?”*

“Yes. I’m going to be alright over here. Instead. Please find out for me just how close ‘Jin Seh-Hahn’ is to becoming a upper Mid Tier Knight.”

– *“...Yes sir. Understood.”*

Sae-Jin ended the call with Kim Sun-Ho and dived into the ocean, transforming into the baby Leviathan.

The moment he came in contact with the cold water, his mind cleared up and the fatigue of the day disappeared altogether.

He couldn't tell whether he was addicted to this feeling, or if this was the feared side effects of the Leviathan Form's growth, but he knew very well that, he'd be unable to stay still if he didn't come to the ocean at least three, four times a week.

"Ghereung, ghereung~~."

A warm smile crept up on his face as he entrusted his body to the ocean's currents.

The brightly shining sunlight and gentle undulation of the ocean; even the chilly Winter winds felt refreshing to him, who possessed thick scales all over his body. It was almost like drinking a refreshing glass of cold water in the middle of a hot Summer day.

And so, that was how he swam on this peaceful and calm ocean. He even had the time to gaze at the migratory birds busy moving about in the air trying to avoid the grip of Winter and thought – *aren't they Muffin's favourite type of snack?*

And so, about thirty minutes had passed like that.

Sae-Jin sensed a strange flow of Mana. He definitely felt this sensation, even though he was as good as half asleep at that time. The flow seemed to enclose the surroundings and it only grew stronger.

However, this was the sea. Also, he didn't feel threatened by it, so he ended up not minding it at all.

And that was how it proved to be too late, by the time the sky suddenly became dark and the space where he was swimming became isolated from the rest of the world.

"...!!"

The surrounding world simply vanished, including the sea, and only darkness remained where he was. Sae-Jin hurriedly opened his eyes and looked around.

‘An isolation barrier?’

Was this China’s doing? But wasn’t this too fast? Sae-Jin’s brain spun really quickly as he tried to figure out what the hell was going on, but when he took a whiff of a certain smell coming off silhouettes of ‘people’ appearing from the darkness, his expression hardened.

[We will now carry out our mission as planned.]

Smelling like blood and speaking in an unknown language – they could only be the Vampires.

Initially, there was only one, but then, the presences began increasing quickly.

Two, four, eight, then sixteen... Sae-Jin couldn’t help but swallow his saliva in nervousness at the alarming increase in Vampires’ numbers.

[Its appearance is really cute, isn’t it? Can I touch it once we knock it out?]

A female Vampire pointed at Sae-Jin and muttered something. He couldn’t understand a thing she said, but she still gave him the creeps, so he slowly backtracked a bit.

[...Even you’re acting like this now? Don’t be careless, for this creature can deal with a Boss Monster alone.] [I’m not being careless.]

When this woman smiled and opened her arms wide, a crimson-coloured whip suddenly materialised in one of her open palms. That was the signal; the rest of the Vampires all produced their weapons and readied magic spells.

“ ... ”

Whatever the case may have been, these Vampires were targeting him. For now, Sae-Jin suspected that they were here because he had disrupted their plans by killing the Flesh Golem.

‘Do I need to fight as the Leviathan?’

Sae-Jin fell into a dilemma. It was more than likely that the Leviathan Form was the most powerful Monster Form he possessed right now. But in this space where there was no water, it might be prudent to change into another Form.

He quickly looked at the darkness surrounding the area.

The Leviathan Form allowed him to understand all types of Mana flow that he came in contact with.

Although this place looked like the inside of an isolation barrier, it actually was not. Most likely... he was trapped in a 'Fissure', the space existing between different worlds.

And so, Sae-Jin was finally enlightened on just how all those Monster incidents happening all over the world were being carried out. If these bastards could artificially create Fissures, then calling out Monsters would be easier than taking a candy off from a baby's hands.

'In that case, even the Lycan Form might not be enough.'

If it was just a barrier, then he could shatter it in the Lycanthrope Form, but now... Now, he decided that it was better to battle his opponents as the Leviathan.

[Attack.]

And when the leader-type Vampire spoke that one word...

Vampires easily numbering past 40 began their organised assault.

Mana Spears, whips, swords, fireballs, pale blue ice crystals, flaming arrows, etc, etc...

Countless magic spells rained down on him – a symphony of colours from spells dyeing the dark world in shades of rainbow.

Sae-Jin gazed at the phenomena produced by the agitated Mana, and then... perfectly replicated every single one of them.

Although there wasn't any seawater, the Mana filling up the body of this baby Leviathan was more than capable of producing brilliant and awesome magic effects.

KKWAHAANG!!!

The attacks unleashed by both the Vampires and the Leviathan, without a doubt, belonged to the same category of 'magic'.

But Vampires immediately realised as soon as their attacks collided, that the gap of 'density' and 'strength' between them was definitely not in the same category at all.

"Kkeuark!!"

"Kkeu-eh!!"

The copied magic easily overcame the attacks of Vampires and countless Spears and tyrannical storm winds swallowed them all up in one go. It was such an overwhelming might, not even their screams of pain and terror could survive within the shock waves of the magic-induced explosions.

[...It is really strong. Not for nothing it's called the king of the East Sea.]

The female Vampire leisurely muttered. Seeing her, Sae-Jin felt something was wrong. How could she be that relaxed, when nearly half of their original 40-odd group had been killed?

Not too long after, Sae-Jin understood the source of her leisure. From the darkness, more Vampires made their entrance. And this time, there were lots more of them.

[Let's try this again.]

As soon as the leader-type finished murmuring his words out, numerous magic spells formed on the hands of the new Vampires.

Sae-Jin bit his lip.

[Ohh. Look at it biting its lip. How cute.] [... Will you just shut the f*ck up?]

The amount of Mana he wasted replicating all those magic spells was around 10% of his total reserve. However, if he held back from using attacks that consumed a lot of Mana, like Breath, and utilised Skills such as Warrior of Reversal to the fullest, then... He should be able to withstand their assault for twenty more times.

'...Hopefully, I can end this before then...'

Sae-Jin's face hardened as he expelled Mana. All around him, drops of water bubbled up. At first, they looked fluffy and rather adorable, but these water bubbles suddenly shot out towards the Vampires, and then...

[They are explosives!! Run!!]

KKAAHAANG!!!

As soon as arriving near the targets, they caused a huge explosion.

And so, an unending battle that seemingly repeated itself over and over, began for real.

Magic spells Sae-Jin never had the chance to use until now continued to rock the Fissure like crazy. However... no matter how many he killed, Vampires kept on rushing at him like tsunami waves.

To see these beings with low overall population to use the human-wave strategy – panicking Sae-Jin then belatedly found out that these bastards were actually nothing more than artificial dolls. They were so well constructed, he could only discover this cruel fact after touching one accidentally.

Unfortunately, his situation didn't improve just because he discovered their trick.

He thought about using a spell that would blow up the entire space within the Fissure, but then, it would be meaningless if the few of the Vampires who knew the ins and outs of the Fissure's construction could simply slip out and slip back in during the explosion itself.

And like this, wastage of Mana continued on.

‘...This... this might be troublesome...’

As his Mana reserve ran out, his consciousness began to blur, and his body started to feel lethargic.

He desperately fought off the uncontrollable fatigue, but in the end, stopped all his movements and slowly closed his eyes.

[Wow. Is it finally over? It's crazy strong. Elder, we ended up wasting over 1000 Mana Crystals today. Looks like we'll be scolded by the Lord...] [... That's still better than being on the receiving end of Lady Bathory's fury.]

Just as the breathless Vampires came closer and touched his unmoving body...

SFX for things receding quickly

Suddenly, winds blew, and the world regained its lost colour.

As the darkness receded and the nature returned back to its normal state, cold seawater embraced the drying skin of the baby Leviathan.

[...Ow, sh*t.]

And Sae-Jin regained control of his blurring consciousness and abruptly opened the blue eyes of the Leviathan.

—-!!!

When his consciousness cooled, the only thing filling up his head was pure rage.

He didn't care just how this trap was broken, not at this moment.

He let out an angry roar without realising it himself. When he did that, a storm violently whipped up over the ocean and the waves began powerfully rocking back and forth.

[Condition fulfilled: The Sea Monster's Fury.]

The instinctive fury of the Sea Monster who was nearly defeated.

- The overall growth of the 'Sea Monster' Form will increase by 10%!!
- The species-unique Trait "???" has been added.

"???" can only be acquired by divine existences.

Sae-Jin felt his point of view suddenly rising up higher.

Those damnable Vampires became a lot smaller than before, and in the distance, he could see a boat carrying the person responsible for disrupting the Fissure's

formation. And on that boat, someone he didn't expect to see, Hazeline, was lying down on the floor in complete exhaustion.

[...Ohhhh.] [Holy cow.]

The Leviathan had grown twice the old size, and it was now glaring at the Vampires with eyes full of hostile intent.

After seeing this appearance where the definite trace of the real dragon could be felt, they even forgot the situation they were in and could only express their admiration.

[S, since the event has unfolded this way, we should evacuate...]

Vampires tried to run away by changing into fog, but Sae-Jin wasn't going to let them.

In the blink of an eye, seawater rose up in circular shape and formed a huge dome, and all the Vampires who got trapped inside began carrying looks of despair.

CHAPTER 114

KING OF THE INFINITE OCEAN, LEVIATHAN (6)

Inside the gigantic dome of water created by the Leviathan, the flow of Mana to the outside was completely blocked off, rendering Vampires' unique movement magic spells utterly useless.

On top of this, they couldn't summon hundreds of dolls they used to fill up the Fissure, which only left a dozen Apostles behind...

[So, what should we do now?] [Try contacting Lady Bathory, for now.]

Bothering their future queen with this matter might result in their limbs being torn off, but well, judging from the murderous look the enraged eyes of the Leviathan were giving off, it seemed the Monster wanted to rip them apart and then blow them up into specks of tiny dust to boot. It was obviously more preferable to just lose an arm or a leg instead...

[Uhm, ah... Well, I tried that already, but... this barrier might be made out of water, but there aren't any gaps there, you know?] [...] [Tehee. Looks like we're pretty much screwed now, don't you think?]

How can you laugh at a time like this?! The leader-type Vampire glared at the female Apostle and bit his lip.

Too bad, they weren't even given enough time to pick faults with each other.

KHUGUGUGUNG

The surface of water they were standing on rumbled violently, before being overturned by a truly terrifying aura and tried to swallow them up.

Left with no choice, Apostles began reciting magic spells. Although they were like a bunch of fireflies burning away in front of the mighty sun, the pride of the Vampires under the Bathory banner didn't allow them to give up without a good fight.

[Oh, well. We are prepared to die here, so you should escape alone, Elder. Your role of

creating artificial dolls is crucial to our success. And more importantly, you already know this – that we can be reborn as your dolls anyways.]

The female Vampire never lost her leisurely smile. The leader looked around, and saw other Apostles looking back at him with determined expressions.

[...Very well.]

The leader murmured lowly. And all of a sudden, other Apostles began vomiting blood. This blood flowed over the water's surface and rose up to become a barrier against the incoming violent waves.

[I shall see all of you again later.] [Of course. Please do hurry up, though.]

It was her job to open up the escape route. She vomited out blood one more time, this one aimed towards the wall of the water dome forcibly embracing them.

SFX for things melting (?)

The moment that corrosive blood came into contact, the wall of seawater melted and a hole so small that a single particle of dust might go through was created. And the leader-type Vampire immediately changed into fog and escaped through there.

So, one of them made it out of there but the female Vampire, who was stumbling around weakly now, no longer had sufficient Mana left even to let her continue float on the water. Her body began to sink to the bottom of the ocean.

[I really hate being in pain, though...]

She quietly muttered as she witnessed the sight of the Sea Monster in a dragon's appearance angrily pouncing on her comrades.

SFX for things shattering

The blood barrier created by exhausting the life forces of the Vampire Apostles was shattered in an instant by the dragon's jaws, and then...

Huge, destructive waves caused by the Leviathan violently crashed into them, swallowing them up in the blink of an eye.



After the battle had come to an end.

Kim Sae-Jin the Leviathan lowered his long neck until his sight was on the level with Hazeline's yacht. Although now looking more masculine, the face of the creature still possessed some cute bits here and there.

"Hahah..."

She smiled weakly and raised her body up, before gently stroking the large creature's wet and soft nose. The Leviathan closed its eyes and accepted her patting. It was to express his gratitude for her timely aid. But then, Hazeline stopped patting him and began to explode out in laughter.

"...It's okay to change back to a human now, Mister Sae-Jin."

The Leviathan's body trembled ever so slightly. But even with that small movement, the sea reacted rather violently.

"Right now, thanks to your actions, there is an emergency warning out for strong winds and heavy seas, so please, don't shake around so much."

She spoke up to here and then, lied back down on the yacht's floor.

She didn't even have any energy left to talk anymore. She did spend considerable amount of Mana trying to locate the physical 'link' that connected the Fissure to this realm of existence, as well as to destroy it, after all. Those damnable Vampire bastards had placed the linking talisman at such a ridiculous depth of the ocean, one might have needed a submersible to get there.

"Fuu-woo..."

As she let out a long sigh, a splash of water could be heard, followed by the Leviathan changing into Sae-Jin as he climbed aboard the yacht.

"...You've figured it out already?" (Sae-Jin)

"It wasn't really difficult to connect the dots, you know... I mean, with the exception of Mister Sae-Jin, where in the world can you find Monsters willing to help people out?"

But still, it is really incredible – you can become a dragon? Just what is the limit of your Trait?” (Hazeline)

Hazeline stared at Sae-Jin as she muttered out. Feeling somewhat embarrassed, Sae-Jin scratched the back of his neck as he sat down on one of the seats available.

“But, how did you know where I was going to be?” (Sae-Jin)

“...Eh?”

At his wonderfully simple question, Hazeline found herself panicking somewhat.

The truth is, I sail on my yacht almost everyday, hoping to run into you. And just like always, I also came out today to drift around but then, I sensed a strange flow of Mana and decided to check it out...

Obviously, she couldn't say this out aloud.

“N, nowadays, many sea Monsters have disappeared, right? So I... uh, this has become a bit of fashionable pastime for Wizards now. Thing is, the ocean is the origin of all nature, so the density of Mana here is so much higher. So, just by breathing in the air of the sea, Mana is replenished, the society is stabilised, the world becomes a brighter place...” (Hazeline)

“And so, you found me coincidentally?” (Sae-Jin)

“...Yes. And please, don't talk to me anymore. Feels like I'm dying right now.” (Hazeline)

She cut off the conversation there, and as if to show her refusal to answer any more questions, she lied down on her belly. So, Sae-Jin took a good look around the yacht, hoping to pilot it instead of her. The grey-coloured vessel was of a decent size, and its smart, clean interior seemed to match her personality to a T.

“So, how do I control this boat?” (Sae-Jin)

He asked as he played around the helm. Since he couldn't see a normal ignition, he thought this boat could be a Mana-operated magic equipment.

“Hello?”

When he didn't hear any reply, he tilted his head and turned to take a look.

Snore, snore...

Hazeline's rhythmic and calm breathing could be heard. She had fallen asleep.

Sae-Jin stood there, studying her appearance for a while. Her thick robe was soaked throughout and was clinging to her body, proudly showing off her beautiful curves...

"Keheum."

It was truly a bewitching appearance. Spitting out a fake cough, Sae-Jin hurriedly pulled his attention away and focused on the displays surrounding the helm.

It seemed that the Goblins' Craftsmanship was able to display its amazing usefulness here, as he could get the hang of how to operate this boat pretty quickly.

SFX for motors coming to life

When he sent in some of his Mana, the speedboat showed signs of movement. Thankfully, he had enough Mana to pilot this thing. Thanks to the Leviathan Form growing by extra 10%, his Mana reserve was overflowing right at this moment.

Kkhugugung-

Unfortunately, he couldn't control that newly-acquired power properly, and ended up vigorously pouring more Mana in than necessary – and that caused the speedboat to soar up high into the sky like a cruise missile being launched.

"Wow."

Kim Sae-Jin exclaimed out in admiration and enjoyed this high speed cruise, but then, he heard a loud scream of a woman from his back. Stunned silly by this cry, he quickly brought the vessel to a stop and took a look backwards. Hazeline was whimpering pitifully while holding her head tightly.

*"*Sob*... *Whimper*"*

It seemed that, because of the sudden acceleration, her body was launched up into the air and then crashed down, thereby causing some damage. Sae-Jin felt responsible and

slowly approached her.

“Are you alright?” (Sae-Jin)

“...G, go away. I’m fine. Fine, I said.” (Hazeline)

Unfortunately, all she did was to cover her face with her hands and angrily pushed him away.

“Let me take a look.” (Sae-Jin)

“No. Just go away.” (Hazeline)

“Wait a min...”

“I said, just go away!!”

She shouted out and wildly shook her head, and at the same time, a thin stream of blood trailed her chin and fell down. Sae-Jin traced the blood all the way back to its origin, and confirmed that it was her nose...

“...Here.”

He quickly handed over an emergency potion to her and returned to the helm.

This time, he poured in only the adequate amount of Mana, and did his best to maintain a steady pace as he piloted the vessel.

And so, about ten minutes passed by, and before long, Hazeline stealthily made her way next to him. The potion did its job and healed both her internal and external wounds, and she appeared to be perfectly healthy now.

SFX for a soft humming of a song

Sae-Jin glanced at Hazeline as she began humming out a song.

Her wind-swept hair; facial features that a divine potter must have poured all his considerable might to mold into perfection; and then, her remarkably flawless pale skin – calling this the most magnificent view in history seemed entirely appropriate at that very moment.

“Miss Hazeline?”

He cautiously called out her name, which made her turn her head and look at him. And when their eyes met, her body shook noticeably, but she didn't avert her gaze.

“...Y, yes?” (Hazeline)

“I want to thank you for today. You really saved my bacon back there.”

He smiled warmly as he spoke. In other words, that smile was directed to her...

She stared at him in a daze for a little while, before breaking out into a short chuckle and gently grasped his hand holding the helm.

“...If you want to thank me, treat me to a meal sometime later on. And you're not supposed to hold the helm that way – not like how you hold the car's steering wheel.”

She began fixing his grip on the helm, one finger at the time – all the while, feeling her chest fill up with this sensation of satisfaction.

“Oh. So, I'm supposed to hold it like th... Huh?!” (Sae-Jin)

Too bad, this romantic scene came to an abrupt end real fast. In the distance, by the land where they were returning to, they could see vicious storm winds and tsunami waves powerfully assaulting the coastline.

“...Didn't I tell you? That there is an emergency warning out for strong winds and heavy seas thanks to you, Mister Sae-Jin.” (Hazeline)

Seeing the chaos over yonder, Hazeline let out a hollow chuckle.

“Damn it, it's happening again. The Leviathan Form is just too powerful and it's hard to control its strength properly.” (Sae-Jin)

“Ah, well. It's totally understandable for a Leviath... What did you just say?! A Leviathan?!?”

Suddenly, she cried out in alarm. He could definitely see panic written large within her extra-large rounded eyes.

“Y, yes. But... what’s the matter? Did something happen?” (Sae-Jin)

“No, nothing at all... It’s just... I thought it was an Azure Dragon, but to think, it was actually a Leviathan...”

Hazeline playfully distanced herself from him. Sae-Jin simply chuckled and grasped her wrist, pulling in closer. Her face blushing slightly at this light skinship, she stood right next to him as if she had no choice in the matter.



After that incident had come and gone, this and that happened.

The unseasonal storm caused by the Leviathan, named ‘Supreme’, brought about extreme weather conditions and heavy rainfall to the entirety of the Korean Peninsula; then, there was a huge explosion at the Gangwon Province’s most luxurious hotel ‘Romance of Dawn’ which destroyed a portion of the top floors. And finally, less than a month after the Flesh Golem was defeated, another Boss-level Monster made its entrance.

“It’s also in the Gangwon Province this time as well. Are you planning to go?” Asked Kim Sun-Ho.

Kim Sae-Jin was looking at a piece of an official document in his hand and had been pondering for a while now.

It was the so-called ‘request for cooperation’. The government sent it over to Sae-Jin and The Monster, after realising how grave the situation truly had become. And on this paper, there was a list of names requested to participate, and lo and behold, ‘Kim Sae-Jin’ was among those.

“...They are even calling in High Tier Hunters as well?” (Sae-Jin)

“Mm? Ah, it seems so, yes. Well, the scene of you fighting had been recorded, after all.” (Kim Sun-Ho)

“Well, that’s true, but...”

Actually, it didn’t really matter. A Boss-level Monster was a gold mine of experience points and nice, juicy bonuses. And if he participated in a Boss raid as a ‘human’, no

doubt he'd acquire new Skills as well.

"What do you think, Mister Sun-Ho?"

"In my opinion... I believe it's correct to participate, boss. Of course, there is a chance that the government is actually trying to keep you in check with this, but if you, the Guild Master, participate in the raid, it'll be the case of 'Noblesse Oblige', a good chance to solidify our image in the public eye. With this chance, you'll become a bona fide saviour."

"...Hmm."

"On top of that, I hear the Boss is a lot weaker than that Monster bird from before."
(Kim Sun-Ho)

Kim Sae-Jin's head tilted to the side in confusion.

"A lot weaker than the Monster bird? Then, why not go with a small elite force, just like back then?" (Sae-Jin)

"Oh, that. After the incident with the Flesh Golem, the government decided to take command from now on whenever a Boss Monster appears, so it's no longer possible to do that, boss."

"...Ah. Aha."

SFX for a mobile phone vibrating

Almost at the same time, Sae-Jin's phone went off. Kim Sun-Ho signaled with his eyes that it was fine, so Sae-Jin pulled it out from his pocket.

There was a single text message.

– I'm outside now. Where are you now, Mister Sae-Jin?

"Is it from Miss Yu Sae-Jung?"

Kim Sun-Ho asked with a content smile on his face.

However – Sae-Jin couldn't make a proper reply. All he could do was to evade the

subject altogether.

And that was because, the name shown on the phone's screen wasn't Yu Sae-Jung, but Hazeline.

CHAPTER 115

HEROIC (1)

After ending the meeting with Kim Sun-Ho, Sae-Jin headed off to a famous restaurant with Hazeline who was waiting for him outside. Each of the tables were partitioned off in this restaurant, which meant it was perfect for someone like Sae-Jin who was just too well known by pretty much everybody.

“Excuse me? You’re going to participate in the boss raid? But why?!” (Hazeline)

In the midst of having a quiet meal, Hazeline suddenly let out a loud cry as her eyes went extra round.

To show how shocked she was, she even ended up inadvertently squashing the meat of a fish she had been carefully cutting into.

“I thought that it might be for the best.” (Sae-Jin)

“No, wait, why does Mister Sae-Jin have to go? Besides turning into Monsters, you aren’t that good at anything else, though.” (Hazeline)

“...What do you mean by that? Haven’t you seen that video of me fighting all those Doo-Urk-Shi-Nees online? Hell, the number of views for that is already past ten million now.”

Hearing Hazeline’s words that could either be interpreted as words of worry or a barely disguised insult, Sae-Jin’s eyes narrowed to a slit.

“No, that’s not it. What if you encounter a situation where you can’t deal with it as a human? Your Trait might be revealed to the rest of the world!”

“Something like that won’t happen, so don’t you worry about that. Besides... You know, I got this feeling that, even the current me as a human can easily defeat you, Miss Hazeline,” said Sae-Jin, while smiling brightly.

Hazeline reciprocated his smile with her own for a short while, but then, her expression hardened very soon as if her pride had been damaged by his claims.

“It’s nice to be treated as a damsel in distress, but... You won’t even last ten seconds against me.” (Hazeline)

At Hazeline’s cold voice, this time it was Sae-Jin’s pride that got wounded.

“Ten seconds?! Hmm. Back then, when you got ambushed, just who was it that came to your rescue... If I remember correctly, a certain someone was just standing there, lost and confused – did I see that wrong, I wonder?” (Sae-Jin)

Kwajeek-

Chopsticks in her hand suddenly snapped in half.

“Back then, that weird barrier prevented Mana from following my orders, didn’t it? Don’t you know that Mana is more important than life itself for a Wizard? If they didn’t deploy that stupid barrier, I wouldn’t have needed your help in the first pl...”

“Yes, yes. I got it. You’re indeed *the* A-class Wizard, Shenarine.”

“Please don’t push my buttons and make my old temper to flare up. Even though I look like this, as an Elf Wizard, my pride knows no bounds.”

One could say the true essence of the modern day Wizards consisted solely of stubbornness, ego, pride and unshakeable confidence. In other words, a Wizard was incredibly proud of her abilities, but if one considered that said Wizard to be an Elf on top of it all... it didn’t take a genius to figure out how crazy stubborn she would be.

“Okay, fine. However, just what kind of work did you do in the past? I heard you mention the Mafia, the Triads, etc, etc, back then.” (Sae-Jin)

Hearing his question, Hazeline narrowed her brows as she picked up new chopsticks. Her hand movement was quite rough, her desire to warn him off the topic rather apparent in her mannerisms.

“You’re better off not knowing.” (Hazeline)

“...”

Kim Sae-Jin’s expressions hardened. It sure didn’t feel good to be treated as a weakling, unfortunately.

“If you’re like this, would you like to spar with me after the meal’s over?” (Sae-Jin)

He suggested as he sipped the cold water. Meanwhile, Hazeline had to lower her head to make sure he didn’t see her lips trying to curve upwards in a grin.

“...But what will you do if you end up getting killed?” (Hazeline)

“Hah. Wow. I don’t even know what to say to that.”

“Okay, then let’s meet up again tomorrow. I shall take a look whether you have the qualifications to participate in that boss raid or not.” (Hazeline)

“Yes, fine. We’ll see. We’ll see.”

Sae-Jin replied back bluntly, while Hazeline was laughing inside her mind. She was pleased by the fact that they were able to smoothly (?) plan out yet another appointment, just like that.



In order to counter all the chaotic Monster incidents happening lately, the Korean government temporarily created the ‘Monster-related Disaster Management Task Force’. And currently, inside the briefing room located within the Task Force’s HQ in the main city of Gangwon Province, a meeting was taking place.

“This Boss Monster is a brand new type that hasn’t appeared before until now. Its outer appearance resembles a cat with a big 5-metre body, but it seems that the Monster’s specialty lies in its ability to manipulate minds. It has somehow gained control of many Monsters within the Monster field and has created an army.”

The identities of those in the meeting were who’s who of the Knight society. Kim Yu-Rin from the Raven Order, Vice Order Master from Goryeo, Daebaek, etc, etc – all of them were individuals wielding tremendous influences.

“In order to combat this enormous army, unlike the last two Boss raids where only the Knights with Tiers higher than Mid, upper Mid had participated, this time we are going to call on the Knights with lower Tiers, as well as Hunters with upper Mid Tier rankings.”

“Ah, hang on for a second there. It’s related to what you just said... Is it true that

‘person’ is also going to participate in this boss raid?” (Oh Jung-Hyuk)

The Vice Master of the Daebaek Order, Oh Jung-Hyuk, carefully tested the waters. After becoming a Highest Tier after his achievements got publicly recognised, he was walking around lately with his shoulders and back stiff from ego. Obviously, he was busy showing off, with the excuse of this being the resulting pride of a Highest Tier or some such.

“Yes, he said he will.”

“Huh-uh. That means we must be especially considerate towards his needs. If, for some reason, something untoward happens to him, that will be a great misfortune for this nation...” (Oh Jung-Hyuk)

This was an expected response from the Daebaek Order – after all, they were able to rise up through the rankings solely due to The Monster’s generosity and support.

“What do you all think?” (Oh Jung-Hyuk)

Oh Jung-Hyuk took a glance at Kim Yu-Rin. His eyes told her to follow up on his words, but she could only avoid his gaze while looking decidedly embarrassed.

“...Still, as a High Tier Hunter, it’s only right for him to participate. I think it’s already a show of consideration from our government by requesting him to join in this raid. Besides, didn’t he say he’d participate with his own mouth?” (Kim Soo-Hoh)

It was then, Vice Master Kim Soo-Hoh from the Goryeo Order let his displeasure known. It seemed that, since the Trilogy’s founder, Kim Yak-Sahn, was the Order’s Master, and that the ‘negotiation’ with The Monster had collapsed some time ago, they were planning to be in an openly hostile relationship now.

“How the hell do you refuse such a request? From the beginning, they should have excluded him because of his circumstances. It’s not always the best to stick to the conventional rules all the time. If the Guild Master of The Monster is going to join in this raid, what would other countries think of us?” (Oh Jung-Hyuk)

“Obviously, they would go, ‘what a fair-minded and advanced nation’. What do you think?!” (Kim Soo-Hoh)

“What did you say? Is it ‘fair’ in your *country* if your president enters the battlefield

personally?” (Oh Jung-Hyuk)

“What a strange example. Is Kim Sae-Jin a president already? Obviously he’s not! Also, since he’s no longer active in the front lines, and he’s a Hunter only in name now...” (Kim Soo-Hoh)

“Uh-huh!! You’re being too careless with your remarks!!” (Oh Jung-Hyuk)

A sudden outburst of argument over Kim Sae-Jin became incredibly heated in the blink of an eye. There were quite a few members of the Trilogy present, so the two sides were split equally down in the middle. And so, the briefing room had become the ground for the totally-unnecessary factional infighting.

“...Everyone, just stop what you’re doing, right now. Didn’t mister Kim Sae-Jin say he will participate?” (Kim Yu-Rin)

Finally, unable to endure it any longer, Kim Yu-Rin shouted out.

“Huh-uh. Even the Knight Kim Yu-Rin is saying such a thing?” (Oh Jung-Hyuk)

Was this a display of over the top near-religious fervor? Oh Jung-Hyuk slammed his palm down on the table and clicked his tongue.

“Mister Kim Sae-Jin did so many good things for you guys, yet you’re acting so ungratefully...” (Oh Jung-Hyuk)

“What do you mean by that!! I shall call him right now and confirm his intentions, once and for all!! Will that be fine?” (Kim Yu-Rin)

“...Keheum.”

At her declaration, all the others kept their mouths shut. Some of them even looked at Kim Yu-Rin with eyes of undisguised envy. After all, being able to call Kim Sae-Jin on a personal level meant that she was that close to him.

SFX for continuous ring tones

They could hear the sounds of the phone’s ringtone over the speaker. Everyone tensed up and waited – and waited, and then, waited for some more. Unfortunately, what greeted them at the end of all that waiting was a voice of a woman saying...

[The person you wish to call is busy. Please call again later...]

“...”

A loud chuckle broke all that graveyard-like silence pervading the briefing room.

“...With you acting like that, obviously he wouldn’t answer your call.” (Oh Jung-Hyuk)

Oh Jung-Hyuk’s lips twitched in a barely-contained satisfaction.

“I, I shall call him one more time.” (Kim Yu-Rin)

“No, that won’t be necessary. He isn’t going to answer it anyways.”

“No, no. Wait a minute...”

“For now, let’s postpone that discussion after confirming with him at a later stage, and resume the rest of the meeting.”

For some reason, the mood inside the briefing room turned for the better at the expense of Kim Yu-Rin’s embarrassment.

And as the meeting resumed, she continuously glared at the phone while carrying a sullen expression. But by the time Sae-Jin called her back, it was one hour after the meeting had come to an end.



1st of February.

The defensive line was constructed on the passage lying between Seoul and the Gangwon Province. Because of the Boss’s ability to mind control many other Monsters, there were numerous Knights, Hunters and Wizards gathered up by the line this time.

And, if one were to pick someone rather special amidst them... Then, it would be a certain someone who was neither a Knight nor a Wizard, but a measly Hunter.

“W, wowsers. Isn’t he that Kim Sae-Jin?”

“It’s my first time seeing him in the flesh... He’s really as incredible as rumoured,

right?”

Almost everyone gathered by the defensive line continued to glance at the High Tier Hunter Kim Sae-Jin's direction, but none dared to approach him.

And as he stood there, being on the receiving end of all those envious stares, out of the blue, four Griffins flew in the sky above his position. Even though they carried riders on their backs, these creatures temporarily ignored their commands and circled above Sae-Jin as if to give their greetings.

“Oh! So this is where you were, Guild Master! I was looking for you just now.”

Not only that, many high-ranking government officials, as well as Vice Masters of well-known Orders and several Highest Tier Knights came over, bowing their heads and requested for a handshake, too. One or two of them suffering from lack of patience tried to talk to him about this and that business-related matters, but Sae-Jin politely told them such things should be discussed after the current calamity was addressed first.

It sure was an awkward spectacle that didn't fit the description of a battlefield.

‘...And as expected, he is surrounded.’

Hazeline was loitering on the background, unable to find a good timing to get a word in. As she was in a dilemma, wondering whether to swallow the brave pill and step forward or not, Yu Sae-Jung appeared out from somewhere and occupied a place right next to Sae-Jin.

When Hazeline saw the two of them together, a sigh from the depth of her heart automatically leaked out. She forced herself to show up here because she was worried, but now, seeing the two of them together, it was likely her heart would ache bitterly for a long time.

“Excuse me. Which Wizard Tower did you come from?”

It was then, Hazeline heard a really familiar voice from her back, and her scalp tingled in coldness. It was just a simple voice, but still, she could feel her temperature rise up, and cold sweat began forming on her forehead.

“Hello?”

Kim Yu-Rin spoke again as she tapped on the thick-robe wearing Hazeline's shoulder. Hazeline's breathing quickened. Sensing a strange change in atmosphere, Kim Yu-Rin tilted her head, and then...

"Miss Yu-Rin!! We're ready to start the operation, ma'am!"

"...Understood!"

...At the call of her subordinate, she quickly returned to her original position.

"Whew..."

Hazeline did her best to rein her wildly beating heart and let out a long sigh – before falling into yet another dilemma. Should she go away now, or should she stay and take a look for a bit longer...?

Lamentably, it proved to be too late to escape from this place.

That was because, in the far off distance, the marching army of the Monsters could be seen.

Small and medium sized Monsters such as Gnolls, Hoggs, Trolls, Orcs were being accompanied by larger lifeforms such as Ogres, Wyverns, and Basilisks; it was truly a once-in-a-lifetime spectacle, seeing so many Monsters working together to form an army and marching forward like that.

'There's more than expected.'

Kim Sae-Jin lightly bit his lower lip at the sight of the five thousand-strong army of Monsters. The front of the marching pack consisted of weaklings, but the numerous Boss-level Monsters such as Basilisks, Three-Headed Ogres could be seen in the distance as well.

'...This won't turn out to be more difficult than the Flesh Golem, right?'

Although there were a lot of enemies, almost every single Highest Tier in Korea had gathered here. As long as there were no unforeseen events, like the Red Moon suddenly occurring or something similar, they should be able to overcome this crisis relatively safely.

SFX for a sword being drawn out

Kim Sae-Jin unsheathed his sword from his hips. A pure-white scabbard, and the jet-black blade that perfectly contrasted it – a sword so beautiful and intricately crafted, all the surrounding Knights froze in their tracks, totally forgetting the current situation and dazedly staring at it.

“Don’t tense up, let’s do this thing properly now.” (Sae-Jin)

Sae-Jin took a glance at the female Knight next to him who was staring at his sword, and lightly tapped on her shoulder while chuckling slightly to himself.

“Ye, yes? Oh, yes. That’s right!”

The Knight of Eden, Yi Yu-Jin, shouted out in her frozen state. To run into a familiar face here, although he wasn’t Jin Seh-Hahn currently, Sae-Jin still found it rather a welcome coincidence.

Kkwahang!!

It was then. The cannons fired Mana projectiles and signaled the beginning of the battle. With a loud explosion, projectiles accurately slammed into one of the faces of the Three-Headed Ogre.

“All personnel, charge!!”

And with that loud roaring, the entire world seemed to bathe in the blue hues of Mana.

CHAPTER 116

HEROIC (2)

Thanks to such a wild variety of Monsters rushing in like tidal waves, all the carefully-laid plans were thrown out the window and the entire battlefield descended into pure chaos.

It was somewhat unavoidable, since each Monster possessed different strengths and weaknesses, but still, no one could have imagined things would devolve into such a hectic free-for-all, where blood and flesh flung around like crazy.

Whatever the case may have been, Kim Sae-Jin continued to swing his sword. Perhaps surprisingly, there was no sword aura wrapped around his blade. Yet, wherever it went past, space and Mana shattered into pieces, and Monsters' bones and flesh were sliced apart.

This was the result of a certain, ambiguous ability imbued to the sword, called 'slice through anything', its level at a frightening [C+].

"Wow."

While he stood there admiring the sharpness of his own creation, another Monster jumped towards him. Before he could respond, Yu Sae-Jung stepped forward to defend him.

"Oppa, don't let your guard down, no matter what!"

She shouted out and stuck next to him, then proceeded to fire numerous sword auras to many different directions.

Kwahang!!

Pphurng!!

Kkhuowahang!!

The countless beams of sword aura exploded and carved out many craters on the

ground, making sure that no Monster could approach her current position.

She might collapse the whole ground at this rate, thought Sae-Jin as he looked at Yu Sae-Jung busy firing out more beams of that scary sword aura, all the while deeply appreciating once more just what kind of a little monster he had inadvertently created here.

‘Here’s the reason why so many people want to get my Mana Tattoos done. Seriously, how big has her Mana reserve become now?’

Actually, the government officials were busy asking Sae-Jin for a big favour almost everyday at the moment – some might even say begging at this point – due to all these terrible Monster incidents. They were asking him not to limit the recipients of the Tattoos only to his Guild members, but to other Knights as well – after setting a fair enough price point for all, of course.

“Sae-Jung, I’m gonna get out of here for awhile. All this smell of blood is making my head dizzy.”

Leisurely observing her combat prowess for a short amount of time, Sae-Jin chuckled again and told Yu Sae-Jung. She quickly rejoiced at this and shouted at him.

“Go, now!! Hurry!!”

She was supposed to ride on a Griffin while fighting, but had to come down to the ground because she was worried about Sae-Jin’s safety. She didn’t doubt his abilities, not at all – it was just that, she feared for those unseen accidents happening to him.

“Argh, c’mon now!! There are so many of them.”

At the end of her wild, nonstop sword aura firing, surrounding Monsters had all went away for a short amount of time. Seizing the chance of this breather, Sae-Jin handed over the sword to Yu Sae-Jung.

“Take this, Sae-Jung.”

“Oppa, you’re still here? Quickly get goin... What is this?”

“A present. Actually, I brought this here so I can give it to you.”

He smiled as he handed the sword over. After all, he was her boyfriend, so he should have given her a proper gift other than things like several Magic Tattoos, many different artifacts and...

Ah. I did give her a lot of stuff already.

Oh well, whatever. Although I'm still her boyfriend, it's true that I haven't given her any weapons since the Blacksmith tournament way back when.

“...”

Yu Sae-Jung dazedly stared at the sword. A beautiful, powerful sword exuding a noble aura, its body darker than the night sky and its scabbard whiter than snow.

After swallowing down her saliva, she then looked at her own sword. With that innate ability of growing even more powerful the more Monsters she defeated with it, there was no doubt that it had become a sword that was far better than some masterpieces right now.

However, in this very moment... even a casual glance told her all she needed to know. The sword Sae-Jin gave her was on the level of a national Treasure.

“Hurry and take it. This smell of blood is giving me a really nasty case of migraine.”

Kkhugugugung!!!

The noisy tremor of Monsters rushing in could be heard once more. Only then, she took the sword and shouted back at him.

“T, thanks, Oppa!! Really, seriously thanks! But still, you gotta go, now!! Leave this place to us!!”

She quickly pushed Sae-Jin's back. And he chuckled as he left the area.

Whatever – now that he, as Kim Sae-Jin, had participated in the boss raid, now it was time to earn proper achievements.



A fierce battle between thousand-plus Knights and Hunters, against Monsters that easily numbered past five thousand. Knights were slowly getting fatigued from the continuous assaults of Monsters that didn't give them one moment of rest.

The number of Monsters had definitely decreased, but still, many of the combatants felt sick to the stomach, looking at the damnable critters seemingly endlessly lining up through the entire horizon.

"...Pant, pant..."

It was the same story with Yi Yu-Jin. Her Mana was at the proverbial rock-bottom, and the hand gripping the sword was trembling from the numbness.

"Are you okay, Yu-Jin?"

From somewhere, she heard Goh Yun-Jong's voice.

He was making a worried face towards her direction. Just as she was going to wave her hand to show she was more or less fine...

Right behind him, a large Ogre appeared out of nowhere and slammed its huge fist down at Goh Yun-Jong's head.

Yi Yu-Jin's eyes became wide open in panic.

"Yun-Jong!!!"

Her screams rang around loudly; Goh Yun-Jong raised his head to see, and then...

Suddenly, a shadow rapidly drew in close – a man, the ends of his clothes fluttering in the wind, flew in like a bullet and threw a fist towards the Ogre. A 'simple' punch shattered the Ogre's arm, and then, blew up the rest of the large Monster's torso.

Yi Yu-Jin dazedly looked on, as the man leisurely landed on his feet.

The man who killed the Ogre with one punch was none other the Knight of Eden and her colleague, Jin Seh-Hahn.

“Ahjussi!! Didn’t you say you weren’t coming?”

Fully understanding what just happened, she smiled and called out to him.

“Focus first, focus.”

Looking slightly embarrassed, Kim Sae-Jin aka Jin Seh-Hahn threw out another punch. A Monster trying to prey on him got hit by that fist in the face and got obliterated into bits and pieces.

“Mister J, Jin Seh-Hahn!! T, thank you for your help!!”

Escaping from the clutches of death, Goh Yun-Jong patted down his pounding chest and walked up towards Jin Seh-Hahn. Yi Yu-Jin’s eyes were sparkling brightly as she waited.

“I told you to focus!!”

“Kkyack!”

“Eu-arck!!”

Pulling the two dead-tired newbie Knights to his rear, Jin Seh-Hahn powerfully kicked and broke the leg of an Orc Warrior nearby.

‘For my achievements... The Boss Monster is still around, so catching that guy should be enough.’

Kim Sae-Jin used ‘Partial Beastification’ to become Jin Seh-Hahn, so, he was now far more powerful than his ‘normal’ appearance. Plus, as Jin Seh-Hahn’s ‘Trait’, he could freely use his claws as well.

The current situation was, Sae-Jin faked an illness and left the battlefield temporarily, and then, rejoined it as Jin Seh-Hahn. This was the golden opportunity to rise up to the ranks of upper Mid Tier in one go. He obviously couldn’t miss this chance.

And after jumping into the middle of this heated battle, he utilised various Skills and killed many Monsters. Among those Skills, ‘Chain Claws’ showed off its particularly terrifying might. As this Skill allowed a single chop with his claws to rebound off one enemy and continue on to the next one uninterrupted, there could be no other Skill

better suited for this kind of large-scale melee ‘jamborees’.

However, his real aim wasn’t simply this, killing lots of Monsters. No, in order to rise to the rank of upper Mid Tier, he had to catch the crafty Boss Monster that was hiding somewhere and busy manipulating thousands of minions.

Sae-Jin/Jin Seh-Hahn activated the senses of the Wolf and searched for the traces of this hidden Boss.

As his viewpoint widened, both his sight and hearing increased manifold.

Incredible amount of information flooded his optic nerve like a crashing tidal wave.

And as a result, he was able to spot a certain cat-like creature hidden among several large Monsters. And its feline body was also pretty big. Although it sure had a cute face, Sae-Jin had no plans to make it easy for this creature. He kicked the ground and like a bullet, stormed forward towards his new destination.

And it only took a blink of an eye – he arrived in front of the cat while shocking sonic booms exploded behind in his trail. Sae-Jin then grabbed the Monster’s neck tightly, and...

“Here!!”

He ran like his butt was on fire towards where he had spotted Kim Yu-Rin earlier on.

...Well, it was still a bit of a stretch to defeat a Boss-level Monster as a human, after all.

“W, what the?! Who the heck are you?”

Kim Yu-Rin’s eyes went extra round at this sudden turn of events. However, he simply shoved the face of the cat at her direction.

“I’m not interested in a pet right now!!!” (Kim Yu-Rin)

“No, wait, this bastard is their lea...”

SFX for a cat’s threatening growl

At that moment, the Boss cat showed its resistance and swung its sharp claws at Sae-

Jin's arm. He quickly let go of the Monster and retreated – by this time, Kim Yu-Rin realised what was going on, so she quickly slashed out with her sword.

“This is their leader!!”

Sae-Jin didn't stop there, and called for reinforcements. That caused the attention of numerous Knights to redirect, and they began approaching this damn cat's position.

The Boss cat made a weird facial expression and its head turned this way and that, busy searching for an escape route, but...

“There it is!!”

“It's the red-eyed cat!!”

...It was already surrounded by dozens of Knights.

SFX for a cat's far less threatening growl – in fact, sounds more like it's getting flustered.

The Boss cat growled with just that bit less enthusiasm, and on its forehead, a waterfall of sweat drops began pouring down.



And, a week after the end of the defensive battle.

Countless reporters and filming crews as well as Knights were present inside the Tower of Eden. They were here to bear witness to the ascension ceremony, marking Jin Seh-Hahn's historic 'fastest ever' rise to the rank of upper Mid Tier.

The youngest-ever upper Mid Tier Knight was still Yu Sae-Jung, but to equal her rank in only six months, Jin Seh-Hahn was the first in the world to achieve the feat.

“Until now, Jin Seh-Hahn poured all his efforts for the betterment of the society at large, and his exemplary actions towards the interest of the public makes him a role model for others to follow. For these reasons, the Tower of Eden now declares that the Knight Jin Seh-Hahn has ascended to upper Mid Tier.”

With an avalanche of cheering and hand claps, Jin Seh-Hahn was given the platinum

medal that only the upper Mid Tier Knights could receive.

“Thank you very much.”

Bowing his waist in a solemn manner, Jin Seh-Hahn climbed down the stage, and as the person with the title of ‘fastest ever to become a upper Mid Tier’, he had to talk to many other Knights on his way out.

“Back then, the sight of you fighting against many Monsters left a deep impression on me. I was really stunned by it at first, but thanks to your efforts, we were able to end the battle rather easily.” (Kim Yu-Rin)

Attending the ceremony as the representative of the Raven Order, Kim Yu-Rin smiled and offered her hand for a shake. Jin Seh-Hahn/Kim Sae-Jin grasped her hand and nodded his head slightly.

“Thank you very much.”

“It was a wonderful, very manly fighting style. I really liked it. If there is another chance in the future, let’s fight together side by side, again.”

“...You’re overestimating me.”

“Oh~~, so this is where our hero was!!”

And after he shook the hands of several Vice Order Masters such as Oh Jung-Hyuk, Kim Yak-Sahn and Co...

Kim Sae-Jin/Jin Seh-Hahn stood before the throng of reporters.

Many questions came flying towards his way. What was his plan, moving forward; the reasons why he donated most of his monthly salary, even though he still lived in a rented apartment; his thoughts as the newest upper Mid Tier, the fastest to get to the rank, etc, etc...

Sae-Jin only chose to answer those that sounded easy to reply.

“It’s a simple reason why I donate most of my salary. This ‘short’ life, when I leave it, I do so with a pair of empty hands. And when the time comes, I don’t want to have any lingering regrets or desires, so I simply try to help others as much as possible.”

It was an answer that implied the fast-approaching death of Jin Seh-Hahn, but the unaware reporters only showed much fervor at this display of selfless generosity.

And after this press conference came to an end, Sae-Jin approached the officials of Eden and informed them of his intentions to visit the upper floors of the Tower.

Officials didn't stop him. No, they gladly allowed it, telling him to go and take a look at his new office on the 60th floor.

"Thank you."

He replied while doing his best to hold back a smile from forming on his face. After he climbed into the elevator, he didn't press the button for the sixtieth floor, but for the 81st, labelled 'Classified Information Archives'. He didn't feel like wasting time anymore, since this character was going to be killed off very soon anyways.

As the elevator ascended to the 81st floor, many thoughts ebbed and flowed in and out of his head. His father and his mother – just what kind of secrets did they possess that got themselves killed? And just what kind of secret made Eden actively step forward and silence everyone?

It was then, the communication crystal vibrated inside his inner coat pocket. Before he could answer this call, he activated the senses of the Wolf and observed his surroundings. Maybe it was because this elevator was used exclusively by the Eden's Knights, there were no recording devices or CCTV cameras.

"Hello."

– *"It's me, Yu Baek-Song. What are you doing right now?"*

"...I'm on my way to the 81st floor."

Kim Sae-Jin smiled slightly. Hearing that childish voice trying to sound like an experienced old timer, he couldn't help but recall her appearance and thought that she was one funny woman.

– *"Already?!"*

"Yes. Looks like 'death' isn't too far away."

– “...Indeed.”

Kim Yu-Sohn wished deeply for the character of Jin Seh-Hahn to die. It was the same story for Yu Baek-Song as well.

– “But, how will you do it?”

However, the method was a problem. He already had a will prepared and ready. Starting off with the words “I am fully prepared to live a life where I could die at any given moment...”, this will was written by Kim Yu-Sohn. And boy, it was truly something else. It was written so beautifully, he feared that it might even find a place within the Korean language textbooks.

“I’m working on it. Since there are lots of accidents lately... Ah, maybe, I could go on a ‘job’ to that Romance hotel and then the Bathory...”

– “That’s definitely out of the question. Bathory is seriously one dangerous woman. And instead of letting them realise their hideout has been compromised, we need her to continue staying there in the meantime.”

The information on Bathory was only known to Yu Baek-Song, her closest aide, Kim Yu-Sohn and his son Sun-Ho, and finally, Kim Sae-Jin.

“In that case...”

As the conversation continued, the elevator had finally arrived on the 81st floor.

“Ah. I’ll call you later.”

Kim Sae-Jin ended the communication and took a look in front.

Somewhere within this extensive library that took up the entire floor, the truth about his parents, as well as himself, were hiding. He felt anticipation and tension building up. He closed his eyes and took a deep breath. And then, to be on the safer side, he drank a special potion given to him by Hazeline that could calm his mind.

Then, towards the scanner, he brought his upper Mid Tier identification card, and...

He took a large step forward.

CHAPTER 117

HEROIC (3)

Although he was finally inside the very archive he'd been dying to enter... looking around this incredibly vast place, inside of his head was rapidly turning blank.

All his life, he never held what someone might refer to as a relationship with books. So, right now, he didn't even know where to begin on how to find what he was looking for in this humongous library. Also, as every bit of these stored information was 'top secret', there was obviously no kind-hearted secretary or a librarian to help him out, either.

"Hmm..."

Sae-Jin looked around to find if there was an equipment of some sort that could help him browse through the info stored here. But well, there was no such thing – since there was also no such thing as a 'browseable secret information', after all.

In the end, he had to dig through each and every information contained in this library.

On these documents created by magic, many, many events were recorded in detail.

Such things as the time period when the first Fissure showed itself being well over sixty years ago, to a certain terror incident with explosives, which wasn't even a terror-related crime at all, but instead an act of sabotage performed by the government, instead...

They were the kind of incendiary stuff that might have made conspiracy enthusiasts/nutjobs wet their collective pants. But too bad, what he really wanted to find out didn't want to reveal themselves at all, at least not initially.

And so, as he was busy reading through various secret information, the sound of the elevator doors opening could be heard. And then, sounds of high heels stepping onto the floor following that. Sae-Jin put away the info he was reading back into the storage. At the same time, the footsteps ended, and he could feel a gaze directed at his way.

"And just who you might be?"

Hearing that rather sweetly flowing voice of a woman, Sae-Jin slowly turned his head around, and found a blue-eyed blonde foreigner looking at him. She was an incredible beauty, but... Sae-Jin could smell a certain whiff that no human should emit in the first place.

“I’m Jin Seh-Hahn.”

That faint but undeniable whiff of blood. It was so faint, if he was not in Jin Seh-Hahn’s appearance – using the Partial Beastification – he’d never have caught on to it.

His fist clenched tightly before he knew it.

“Oh. Jin Seh-Hahn, the one who became an upper Mid Tier today?”

“...Yes.”

Sae-Jin did his best to maintain a poker face. He hadn’t even found the information he was looking for yet, so it’d only prove disadvantageous if he reacted too suspiciously here.

“So? Why have you come here? No, besides that. Isn’t it too early for you to enter this place?”

In her voice, a faint trace of hostility could be heard.

“I’m also an upper Mid Tier.” (Sae-Jin)

“Of course, I know. You may have the qualifications to enter, but that doesn’t mean you are allowed to.”

“...What does that supposed to mean?” (Sae-Jin)

At Sae-Jin’s sharp reaction, the blonde woman let out a short laughter.

“Think of it as an unwritten rule, okay? There are lots of shocking secrets hidden in here... Of course, Eden’s oath forces you to never reveal her secrets, but normally, when you’ve been an upper Mid Tier for at least half a year, you are given the rights to enter this place only after having a face-to-face interview with a Highest Tier Knight first.”

*...What kind of bullsh*t is this?* Kim Sae-Jin wordlessly glared at her.

“...Are you dissatisfied?”

“No. But I am curious. Who are you?” (Sae-Jin)

“Oh, right. You wouldn’t know about me very well. My name is Mary Chellin, Eden’s High Tier Knight. I came here recently, after a stint over yonder in Great Britain.”

Mary Chellin – it was... a somewhat familiar name. It felt like Sae-Jin had heard it somewhere. But more than anything, even her name felt wrong, somehow.

“I’d like to stay for a bit longer. After all, it’s a friendly suggestion, and not an enforced rule. Isn’t it?” (Sae-Jin)

“...Is that so? Well, aren’t you... quite the daring type.” (Mary Chellin)

In that moment, a faint killing intent rose up, but she skillfully dispersed it as soon as it leaked out.

“...Hmm.”

Seeing her like this, an idea came to Sae-Jin – the perfect scenario on how Jin Seh-Hahn might die.

“But, well... Since a beautiful Knight has suggested it, so...” (Sae-Jin)

Sae-Jin smiled as he walked towards the elevator.

The tragic scene where a hero would meet his end had vaguely taken shape in his mind, but there were still too many things left to finish – to find out all the info related to his parents, as well to figure out how the hell these stinking Vampires had infiltrated the ranks of Eden.

“A wise decision.” (Mary Chellin)

It was difficult to read Mary Chellin’s expressions as she watched Sae-Jin’s back while he climbed into the elevator. It was a somewhat grim face, hard to tell whether she was smiling or glaring.



Leaving the tower, Kim Sae-Jin/Jin Seh-Hahn decided to walk back home. However, not long after, he sensed a tail following him. That forced him to stay as Jin Seh-Hahn, unable to change back, and he had to head towards Jin Seh-Hahn's rented apartment instead.

He arrived at the newly-constructed apartment building, where Jin Seh-Hahn had supposedly rented out a room. He entered the lift, arrived on the uppermost floor and punched in the security PIN for the door. He entered the place as if it was really his own home.

"...Mm?"

The apartment was kept nice and tidy, although no one had been in here for the last six months or so. He even picked up the faint scent of a certain person as well.

'Did Miss Hazeline do this?'

Well, this apartment building was actually owned by Hazeline, so...

For the time being, he took off his coat and took a quick glance outside. He spotted unnatural flickering of the shade cast by the office building across the street, as well as picked up on a faint, nearly indiscernible hint of movement outside.

"Still there, huh."

There were two of them. Judging by their lack of Vampire-unique "bloody" smell, they were most likely normal humans under some kind of mind control spell, or maybe, could even be those artificial dolls as well.

Closing the curtains, he put the kettle on as well as the television. When he fell into the comfy couch, his body felt comfortably numb and his mind seemed to settle down for some reason. Was it because he was always with Yu Sae-Jung back in his other place? To be 'alone' like this, it was...

SFX for a door suddenly unlocking

It was then, the security PIN was keyed in and the front door suddenly opened up. Surprised out of his skull, Sae-Jin immediately dashed towards the door, grabbed the

collars of whoever it was that opened it, and slammed the person down to the ground.

“Kkyaahack!!”

Kwhang!!

Accompanying the dull sound of impact was a cry of a woman. Sae-Jin didn't stop there and grabbed tightly both her wrists with his hand, and then, pulled her hood off.

His body reacted purely out of instincts before he could stop himself, but actually, he was already beginning to think that this woman appeared to be a rather familiar figure.

“Ah, aharck!! Hey, that hurts!! I said, that bloody hurts!!”

With the hood pulled off, a beautiful face slightly covered by messily tossed golden hair and a pained expression was revealed.

And... it was Hazeline.

“Le, let me go, right now!!!” (Hazeline)

“Why is Miss Hazeline...?!” (Sae-Jin)

“I came here to clean the place!! What the f*ck do you think you're doing?!” (Hazeline)

Sae-Jin hurriedly undid the restraint only then, and she shot him a resentful glare full of anger while still sprawled on the floor.

“This hurts like hell, you know? I think it could be fractured... Seriously, why are you so damn violent?!”

While massaging her red and swollen wrists, she angrily growled at him. All Sae-Jin could do was scratch the back of his neck, feeling really apologetic.

“...I'm truly sorry. But why are you suddenly wearing that particular robe...?” (Sae-Jin)

The robe she was wearing currently was specially crafted for her by TM and featured such attributes as 'high-level stealth' as well as many others, so when she appeared like this without any prior hint or notice while Sae-Jin was in somewhat of an alert

state... well, he couldn't really be blamed for being a little bit paranoid.

"I told you, I came here to tidy up the place. That's why I wore this robe. I really like this robe, you know? But besides all that, it was you who asked me to take care of this place, so why are you acting like this all of a sudden?!" (Hazeline)

"Wait a minute, when did I ask you to..."

"You told me to help you conceal Jin Seh-Hahn's real identity." (Hazeline)

Hazeline spoke as she wiped the slight hint of tears from the corners of her eyes.

"Well, I did say that..." (Sae-Jin)

She already knew that Sae-Jin was Jin Seh-Hahn.

No, actually, it was more correct to say that he got found out.

Although his face was covered with thick beard, and he always wore a pair of sunglasses, there were still some similarities between Jin Seh-Hahn's face and that of Kim Sae-Jin's. And it proved to be nigh-on impossible to fool the discerning eyes of a certain Elf Alchemist/Wizard who could divide medical ingredients right down to individual grains.

...The real clincher in this story, though, was Sae-Jin's own stupid self, who, after receiving Hazeline's rather sneaky but clever 'probing' text message that said [Mister Jin Seh-Hahn, whatcha doing? ^^], freaked out and hurriedly called her to find out how she knew.

"W, well, please take a seat in the meantime. I'll go and get you a cup of coffee." (Sae-Jin)

He helped Hazeline to the couch and hurriedly prepared the coffee. She continued to massage her still-aching wrists while observing his busily-moving back.

"Really... how bizarre..." (Hazeline)

"Do you want it black?"

"Yeah. I prefer black."

Soon enough, Hazeline relaxed her back against the couch, while her lips began curling upwards.

To unexpectedly run into him in this manner – it seemed that her luck today was not bad. Honestly speaking, she was loving this sudden encounter, so much so that her feet nearly burst out in fancy dance moves.



For the following week after that encounter with Mary Chellin, Sae-Jin continued to dig through the classified information of Eden. And whenever he did, less than 30 minutes later, different Knights appeared each time and suggested that he should leave. Most of them were normal humans, but 2, 3 of them were Vampires.

And the more he got on the nerves of these Vampires, the clearer the dangers reaching out towards Jin Seh-Hahn became.

The frequency of being tailed increased, and he even got ambushed by Monsters as well – and there were moments when mind controlled citizens attacked him out of the blue.

It was easy to see that they really had something big to hide.

– *“It seems that, many information Vampires don’t want to be revealed are indeed stored in Eden’s archives, sir. That must be the reason why they have infiltrated it, despite the risks. However, those records are created by using magic, so they can’t be destroyed or moved to elsewhere – which leads to their attempts to disrupt you, instead. Still, were you able to locate the info you were looking for?”* (Kim Yu-Sohn)

The voice coming out from the communication crystal belonged to Kim Yu-Sohn, someone Sae-Jin hadn’t talked to in a long time.

“Feels like I’m getting close. I’ve finally found some stuff related to the things I’ve been looking for.” (Sae-Jin)

– *“In that case, that is a relie... Cough!!”*

Sae-Jin heard a dry cough that didn’t sound good at all.

“Uhm, well... how are you feeling nowadays?” (Sae-Jin)

– *“I’m feeling fine, thank you. My body is old and it has its good days and bad ones, so you don’t have to worry about me, sir.”*

Kim Yu-Sohn spoke in a clearly-fake lively manner. Unfortunately, compared to the past, there was a distinct lack of energy in his voice. Sae-Jin was about to say how worried he was, but...

“Then, about the potion I sent over to you the other day...” (Sae-Jin)

– *“Well, sir. I need to get going now. As for the rest, you should call Sun-Ho... Cough... You should talk to him... Cough, cough...”*

Before Sae-Jin could finish his sentence, Kim Yu-Sohn ended the communication first.

And almost at the same time, his phone vibrated.

When he took a quick glance, a text message from Hazeline was there, asking him if he was coming to Jin Seh-Hahn’s home today.

Sure enough, because he had been acting as Jin Seh-Hahn throughout the week, he ended up interacting with Hazeline a lot more than before. Three times this week already, he evaded those pesky tails and took a break in this rented apartment, and Hazeline came over while carrying delicious food.

All of this was enough to make him feel guilty about neglecting Yu Sae-Jung, so... He typed a short reply and sent it.

[No, not today.]

However, different from the contents of the text message, Sae-Jin changed into Jin Seh-Hahn and headed to the Tower of Eden.



As he stood there on the corner of Eden’s classified information archive, Sae-Jin’s hands holding the documents were trembling noticeably. His back was soaked in cold sweat, and a dull ache invaded his brain.

Finally, after two weeks of nonstop hard labour, he had found it – the documents containing information on his mother, Jin Soh-Young, and the father whom he didn’t

even know what he looked like, Kim Jeh-Hyuk.

“...Ha-ah.”

Wiping away the stream of sweat off his forehead, Sae-Jin slowly opened the documents. And very carefully, he began reading each line of text with all his focus. Trying his best to calm his quaking heart, he spent the total of five minutes reading the first page, but then...

“Jin Seh-Hahn?”

A chilly voice drifted towards his direction.

Maybe because he was too focused on the documents, Sae-Jin couldn't even detect the presence of another person. Almost jumping out of his own skin thanks to shock, he quickly turned around to see, and found Mary Chellin standing there.

“You aren't supposed to look at that. Give it to me.” (Mary Chellin)

She reached out while exuding a thick layer of killing intent. If there was a colour assigned to describe killing intent, then the aura coming off of this woman would no doubt be the colour of blood.

“...Can't do that.” (Sae-Jin)

But he didn't back down.

“Is that so? Well, then... Do what you want. I already gave you a fair warning.” (Mary Chellin)

Sae-Jin was getting ready for battle that could break out at any moment, but she simply turned on her heels and left.

CHAPTER 118

HEROIC (4)

Kim Sae-Jin's mother, Jin Soh-Jung – and his father, Kim Jeh-Hyuk.

Both of them were originally Knights of Eden.

For some unknown reason, his mother got into an argument with several high ranking officials of Eden, which promptly got her fired from her post. As written by Eden, the records stated it was her 'rebellious streak' to blame.

Whatever the case may have been, after leaving Eden, she changed her job to that of a Mercenary and killed many non-human races.

Then, on a certain day.

After operating as one of the finest A-ranked Mercenaries for some time, she went off on a particular mission to hunt down Vampires, as she would have usually. During the mission, though – she ended up encountering the offshoot of the Vampire Race, 'Nosferatu'.

At first, she did try to kill all of them. But then, she was won over by their persuasion – according to Eden, being deceived – and not only did she not kill them, but she even began taking care of many matters for them on her own volition.

In the midst of doing all this, she became pregnant with Sae-Jin. She deliberated on what to do, and in the end, chose to stop what she had been doing until now and returned to Eden's fold, in order to request for their protection. As a result of siding with the Nosferatus, she ended up becoming the target for the Vampires' hate.

Unfortunately, Eden's protection was negligent at best, and led her to die at the hands of the Bathory Vampires.

Kim Sae-Jin carefully read every word of the information on his mother first.

However, when he turned the page over and the information on his father entered his eyes, his mind completely shattered into tiny bits and pieces, making it impossible to

even form a single coherent thought.

His father, Kim Jeh-Hyuk, was a third-generation 'Mah-in'. *(TL: Mah-in = Monster Man. Will use this term from now on. A Monster Man is a Monster that can change into a human's appearance.)*

The story went like this:

Well over 70 years ago, when the world's governments were still trying fruitlessly to conceal the existence of Fissures, Kim Jeh-Hyuk's grandfather stepped onto this planet.

Was it because he was a half Mah-in? He longed to attain pure humanity. And so, he settled down peacefully, fell in love with a human woman, and lived a long and rather fulfilling life, quite unlike most of his peers who were quite a bit more keen on roaming the earth and causing all sorts of mayhem in their wake.

And two generations later, Kim Jeh-Hyuk was born. But hell, he wasn't even aware of himself being a third-gen Mah-in at all.

During his teenage years, he placed all his trust in his 'Trait' and acted like a low-rent thug, but he met Jin Soh-Jung, which became the catalyst to turn his life around.

To be with her, he worked hard to become stronger and entered Eden. And he even created with her a child that kinda resembled himself. But thanks to the Bathorys' scheming, he died without being able to take a look at the face of his own son...

"...This, what the f..."

The truth about his father being a Mah-in was incredibly difficult to swallow. To make sure he didn't read it wrong, Sae-Jin noisily went through the documents over and over again until he couldn't remember how many times he did that.

But the documents were indifferent to his turmoil; even the strain of Kim Jeh-Hyuk's DNA, recovered after his death, had been captured and stored within this archive.

Only then, Sae-Jin began to faintly understand just why he was granted such a strange 'Trait'.

'The mysterious powers called 'Trait', born after the world's natural laws became

distorted, seems to be completely random most of the time, but it can also be recorded into one's genes as well. This occurs when a lifeform jumps between two different worlds and lose most of its original strength, so the laws of the original world will try to augment... '

This was an excerpt from a thesis Kim Yu-Sohn gave Sae-Jin to read. Back then, they were just a random soup of words he couldn't really understand, but now...

Countless strands of thoughts rushed in like tidal waves in his head. Nothing but chaos ruled his mind, and he felt a sickening dizziness that almost made him throw up everything in this stomach. Even regret began hounding him, asking if it was worth knowing this part of the truth.

Before long, he was plopped down on the floor. He didn't even have energy to stand up, only quietly holding his aching head. But his pain didn't want to go away. His blurred eyesights confused him, making it hard to tell whether he was in a bad dream or not.

'I didn't reveal my Trait because I was worried about being mistaken as a Mah-in. But... huh. I was a Mah-in for real.'

He laid there on the floor for a long, long time, before letting out a hollow chuckle mixed in with resignation.



Still suffering from confusion of mind, Sae-Jin exited the Tower to breathe in some cold air. But there was no strength in his legs and that caused him to stumble around like a drunk.

It was a not-so-late afternoon, and there were lots of people going about their daily lives on the streets.

Parents walking hand in hand with their children; students, laughing and walking to wherever their feet took them – these were the displays of love and bond between family and friends, something Sae-Jin had not been able to experience while growing up.

“ ... ”

As he silently took in these sights while aimlessly drifting forward, too many restless thoughts invaded his head once more and complicated his emotions further.

Firstly, should he go and meet the group called Nosferatus, the ones who had some sort of a connection with his mother? But then, what? What should he do next, after meeting them?

“Hah-ah...”

Sae-Jin stood still and let out a soft sigh. Then, a handful of people hesitantly got closer to him. They saw the Eden’s insignia and recognised Jin Seh-Hahn, and began asking for his autographs as well as to take selfies with him. He forcibly squeezed out a smile and said yes.

After talking to people and taking care of their wishes, Sae-Jin resumed his walk.

He walked for unknown amount of time without saying a single word.

On the opposite side of the pedestrian crossing, he spotted a person covered in a robe. The hood covered her head, so her eyes and nose couldn’t be seen, but she was definitely staring at him. The evidence was that thick smile etched on her lips.

Sae-Jin slowly made his way towards her. And as he did so, the smile on her lips became brighter and brighter.

He did tell her not to come... But, the sense of weakness that had taken root in his mind reared its ugly head. For him right now, confused and uncertain, he needed someone to lean on, at least for a short while.

And as he continued to walk towards her location...

Suddenly, the world darkened.

A small part of the curtain of darkness that seemed to swallow every bit of light, including even that of the fading sunset, transformed into a shape of a giant fist, and then – descended down on Hazeline’s head.

“Damn it!!”

Sae-Jin madly dashed towards her direction. He powerfully embraced the totally-

unaware woman, who still carried that smile, and activated the scales of Leviathan to the absolute maximum.

KKWAHHAANG!!!!

A huge explosion of impact reverberated, and shortly after, screams began ringing out on the once-calm roadside.



“Are you alright?”

Trapped underneath the rubble inside the crater, Sae-Jin asked her.

“...Uh-whew. You gave me such a fright, you know? Even if you hadn’t acted, I would’ve blocked it just fine...” (Hazeline)

From within his embrace, a voice filled with fake criticism leaked out. When he took a sneaky glance downwards, Hazeline was there, busy fidgeting around uncontrollably, while both her cheeks were dyed in crimson red.

“I’m asking you, are you unhurt?” (Sae-Jin)

“...You are overreacting right now. Maybe Mister Sae-Jin is mistaking me for a helpless child in her teens? I hate being treated like that, so from next time onwards, please be more mindful of that.” (Hazeline)

Hazeline seemed to be deeply embarrassed for some reason, as she was desperately trying to sound more assertive than usual.

“Well, in that case, my bad. Looks like I made a mistake in rescuing you.” (Sae-Jin)

Giving her a blunt and obviously unhappy answer, Sae-Jin lifted the rubble off himself and stood up.

The scene outside the crater was even more hellish. Several unidentifiable beings of darkness were busy killing people and destroying buildings, their forms taking on the various shapes of large fists, blades, dogs and even Monsters.

“But why...”

Sae-Jin stared at this horrifying sight and asked the rather obvious question.

This was without a doubt, the handiwork of the Vampires, but why did they go to all this trouble? All he did was to take a gander at his own complicated origins as well as the mystery of his parents' deaths.

But to cause such a huge incident that could pull forth the focus of the entire world, just because of those information? Wasn't that like killing an ant with a knife designed to butcher cows? The risk associated with this move was simply too high for the supposed reward on offer.

"What are you waiting for? Isn't this the time for the hero to step forward?"

While he stood there in a dilemma, Hazeline spoke up as she tapped on his shoulder.

'Hero.'

When he heard that word, a lightbulb went off inside his head. Now that he thought about it, the perfect opportunity had unexpectedly arrived in front of him, hadn't it?

"...Miss Hazeline."

Sae-Jin intensely stared at Hazeline. Her face reddened once more as his sharp and manly face focused only on her, and she took a step back. But she didn't forget to reply in a manufactured calmness.

"W, what's the matter?"

"Today, I need your help. I'm going to die today." (Sae-Jin)

Before she could show her terrified shock after hearing his declaration, Sae-Jin pulled out the communication crystal and called a certain someone.

"Mister Kim Yu-Sohn."

– *"Ah, sir, it's me, Kim Sun-Ho."*

It seemed that the graveness of the situation had been already transmitted to him, as Kim Sun-Ho's voice sounded urgent.

“Are you aware of the current situation?”

– *“Yes, boss. The government already requested us for an aid, so six Griffin Riders have been dispatched as we speak. And also, with the issuing of emergency notice, several Mercenaries are heading over there as well.”*

“Ah, is that so? Anyway, Mister Kim Sun-Ho. Jin Seh-Hahn will die today.”

– *“Boss? Ah... Yes sir. I’ll give Miss Yu Baek-Song a call and also deploy the operatives right away.”*

Ending the magic communication, Sae-Jin asked Hazeline with a playful voice.

“Just in case, do you know of any magic spells that can place a person in a state of suspended animation?” (Sae-Jin)

“...I might know one such spell...” (Hazeline)

“...Oh, so you do?”

“Yes.”

He honestly didn’t expect such a spell to exist. Sae-Jin got impressed by Hazeline’s ability as a Wizard all of a sudden, while clenching his fist tightly enough to emit cracking noises.

“Well, in that case... Let’s get going, then.” (Sae-Jin)

“No, wait a damn minute!! You should explain yourself first... Euh!!” (Hazeline)

“Mister Sun-Ho should be arriving soon; hear the rest from him.” (Sae-Jin)

KWAHANG!!!

When Sae-Jin pressed forward into the air with a terrifying might, a huge shock wave shot out in a straight line and blew away all the darkness in its wake. And as the darkness lifted and the scenery became clearer, a mother hugging her child and screaming her heart out could be seen. He changed course almost instinctively and ran towards her, immediately destroying a dark figure shaped like a person hovering near her.

“Kkeuck!!”

The tightly-closed eyes of the mother slowly opened in confusion when nothing happened. And a face of a smiling man filled up the entirety of her vision.

“Please, do not worry. I’m from Eden.”

As soon as he was done with the hero cosplay, as he expected, a bastard emitting that foul smell of Vampires attacked him.

The stinking bastard, covered in head to toe by the darkness, ran up to him and swung its blade without a care or regard for anything.

Clang!!

Claws and the blade collided, sending countless sparks to fly off. But well, the enemy’s blade simply crumbled into pieces after that single collision.

“ ... ”

“ ... ”

Checking his broken stump of a sword for a bit, the darkness stealthily took a step back and surveyed its surroundings.

As expected of Korea that boasted the best level of super-quick response time and suppression in the world – the loud, spirited cries and calls of sharp Mana from the arriving Knights resounded out all over the area.

Since the situation had become critical, the smelly bastard was forced to reveal its trump card. It stood still all of a sudden, and then began reciting a strange chant. There was no sound muttered, only its lips moving incessantly.

It recited for the next ten seconds straight, and when that was over, the darkness that was shrouding the sky suddenly retracted and concentrated into the shape of a huge meteor high in the air.

It didn’t burn like a huge fireball should, nor did it emit any thunderous noises.

Yet, as it rapidly descended with nary a whisper on the ground, the sight of it alone

was enough to instil a sense of total despair in the hearts of all civilians watching it.

What would happen, if something that terrifying fell? Countless civilians lifted their fear-filled eyes towards the sky to look, while some of them quickly began running away with their trembling legs.

“Kek. Work hard.” (Vampire)

As Kim Sae-Jin/Jin Seh-Hahn fixedly stared at the falling meteor, the smelly bastard let out an equally odious grin and disappeared from the spot – a sneer, saying it’d like to see how Sae-Jin might deal with this. And almost right away, he felt a blood-red pair of eyes focusing on him.

It looked like that, this meteor was the sure-kill hidden weapon prepared to destroy Jin Seh-Hahn for good.

But for Kim Sae-Jin... he was feeling so happy inside right now, he almost wanted to thank these fools who had laid out the perfect stage for him.

Looking at the giant black meteor falling towards the earth, Sae-Jin summoned forth every drop of Mana in his body. If it was on that level... although it wouldn’t be easy, he should be able to deal with it.

“Mister Sae-Jin!!”

He thought he heard Hazeline’s voice. She was lying on the ground, mimicking a wounded survivor.

Sae-Jin gave her a signal with his eyes, and then...

Kwahang!!

He kicked the ground hard and launched into the air, becoming a single blue line that shot towards the falling meteor.

In that moment, the eyes of the civilians focused on that line. Even the Knights, who were busy cutting apart the darkness, stopped what they were doing temporarily and stared at that remarkable sight.

CHAPTER 119

HEROIC (5)

Sae-Jin shot forward like a bolt of lightning and arrived at the edge of the meteor. Right away, the incredible temperature of the damn thing wrapped around him as if it wished to melt him down completely. Thanks to this scary heat, the armour set he painstakingly created was melting like wax.

He didn't expect this. Panicking somewhat, he quickly activated both the Warrior of Reversal and the Leviathan's Scales. Only then the heat finally became somewhat tolerable, allowing him to reach out towards the meteor's surface. It was boiling hot, irregularly shaped, and covered in pure darkness.

He wondered briefly what he should do with this meteor but an idea came to him soon enough. Now that he thought about it, there was no need for him to smash it up with his bare fist.

'The Mana Body.'

Couldn't he freely control Mana at will? All he had to do was to rely on this power and change the composition and property of this meteor – he could reduce the killing power to 0, but raise its visual and auditory impact to an absolutely terrifying maximum.

Concluding his thoughts up to here, he placed his hand on the surface and poured his Mana in. Then, the once-quiet meteor began humming uneasily and its surface began wavering as it kept falling to the ground. For Kim Sae-Jin, this was a good sign, but for everyone else watching from the ground below, it was an incredibly worrying change.

"W, what the hell!!"

"It's gonna explode!!"

The jet-black meteor quivered as if it was going to explode. It was as if a fireball was getting ready to expel its own flames out. Civilians and Knights looked on and cried out in despair.

But the actions taken by Kim Sae-Jin the next moment was enough to extinguish that despair out of their hearts.

He clasped the meteor tightly with both of his hands, and expelled Mana out from the bottom of his feet like a rocket, and carried the huge black object back up into the sky.

He soared higher and higher, as if he was prepared to die together with the meteor. From the perspective of the villain who caused this incident, it must've looked like a courageous decision completely out of their previous expectations.

Seeing this amazing scene straight out of their wildest dreams, everyone forgot to run away and continued to look on, completely dumbfounded. What they were seeing was a lone man lifting the heavens up, and it was an utterly heroic sight to behold.

'This... should be far enough.'

He pushed the meteor higher and higher until he arrived at the middle of the sky, then he clenched his fist as tightly as he could.

And then – slammed his fist down on the meteor, its property already changed to something else.

KKWAHAHANG!!!

The world was swallowed up by gigantic explosions. The meteor was bathed in pure white light and blew up into countless fragments. Terrifying shock waves swept out and destroyed nearby buildings, and debris flung in the air to every direction. Knights moved quickly and swung their weapons in order to protect the civilians from the falling debris.

"...Ah."

Before long, the dozens and dozens of explosions finally came to a stop. And a small gasp leaked out from someone in the crowd of civilians.

Up on the sky high above their heads, Jin Seh-Hahn was falling helplessly, his eyes deeply closed.



After blowing up the meteor, Sae-Jin withdrew the remaining energy from his body and retracted his Mana. Actually, there wasn't anything left to retract in the first place. He spent every drop of his Mana and he actually couldn't exert any strength to his body, after all.

Whatever the case may have been, as soon as he lost the support of Mana, he began free falling from the high altitude.

Initially, the speed of falling was so great that it became hard to breathe due to the air pressure building up. But soon enough, the speed decreased by a huge amount and his descent became far more comfortable as a result. Probably Hazeline was to thank for that.

SFX for a gentle swoosh

Slowly settling down on the ground like a falling Autumn leaf, a slim smile slowly formed on his lips as if to say this had been a plentiful satisfying life he had lived.

The only thing remaining now, was Hazeline's magic to cap off the perfect finale.

"Are you alright?!"

However, a scared cry of a woman slammed into his ear canals with vengeance.

His head hurt from the high decibel of that cry, so he minutely cracked open his eyes to look, only to find Hazeline's shocked and worried face filling up his vision.

"Answer me, are you alright!!"

When Sae-Jin didn't reply, she began bursting out in tears and shook his body.

What the hell is she doing?!

Panicking inwardly, somewhat, Sae-Jin couldn't endure it and ended up opening his eyes a little wider and coughed out weakly.

At the same time, countless eyes focused on him.

Too bad, Kim Sae-Jin was determined to die. He slowly reached out with his shaking hands and gently stroked her cheek. And then...

“...whatareyoudoinghurryupwithsuspendedanimationmagicthingyalready.”

...He whispered a rapid firing of words so low that only Hazeline could possibly hear it. She immediately realised it, quickly closed her mouth that was hanging loose in ‘O’ shape, and after wiping her tears away, began chanting a magic spell.

“Thank you.”

This time, Sae-Jin spoke loudly enough so others could hear him. As he staged the final moments of his death, the flow of Mana controlled by Hazeline entered his nostrils.

Almost in an instant, his consciousness began to blur. This feeling was far too complicated to describe...

“.....”

And so, he passed out, seemingly dead, while showing the whites of his eyes. Since such a sight was somewhat unfitting for the final moments of a hero, Hazeline carefully closed his eyelids.

Soon after, deathly stillness visited the world. There were so many people and Knights standing here, yet not a murmur nor breathing could be heard. They simply stood there, dazedly taking in the end of a true hero, who was lying there comfortably.

Those melted armour pieces, his skin and flesh charred and burnt black; his gently closed eyes and on his lips, the last smile he’d ever make.

Just what compelled him to sacrifice himself like that? Just why was he making that satisfied smile as he lay there?

Hazeline stealthily checked the atmosphere around her, and then...

“Sob...”

...Started a rather amateurish performance and beat her chest. This prompted a few of the tearful onlookers to slowly approach her and the dead (?) man. On the other hand, Hazeline was panicking inwardly as the prospect of being surrounded by

strangers was fast becoming a reality.

“Please, make way!!”

Before she was completely surrounded, though – thankfully, a team of paramedics prepared by Kim Sun-Ho arrived on the scene. Pushing away the wall of crowd, they quickly loaded Kim Sae-Jin onto the ambulance and drove off to somewhere.



In front of the Korean National Hospital, where the entry was strongly regulated due to special circumstances of the patients resting inside – reporters from all corners of the globe had set up a camp. They all wore the kind of neat, tidy clothes that didn’t stand out. They were also uncharacteristically keeping silent while waiting for the announcement from the doctors.

“Hah-ah.”

Although there were a lot of people present, the only sound infrequently breaking the silence was those long sighs.

A miraculous life, a tragic death – under the dark sky where rain fell like tears from heaven, no one was brave enough to raise a fuss over the life and death of a bona fide hero.

And they waited for a long time, while the anxiety kept assaulting them. Finally, they saw through the front entrance’s glass a doctor with a pale face walking towards them. Reporters hurriedly got ready and waited for this man’s arrival.

“My name is Kim Hark-Do.”

Kim Hark-Do, a renowned surgeon who performed his operations while extracting the maximum amount of effects from various potions, faced the throng of reporters and nervously swallowed his saliva.

“...Knight Jin Seh-Hahn didn’t suffer any fatal exterior wounds. It was on the level where an operation was deemed unnecessary, and potions would have been sufficient to heal his wounds.”

At the good doctor’s opening statement, all the eyes of the reporters went extra round.

But that was not the end – he sighed out deeply and continued on with his words.

“However... by momentarily exploding several times past his limits and squeezing out every ounce of Mana... he suffered the condition of ‘Mana Deviation’, and so...”

His head hung down as if he couldn’t face the crowd anymore.

“...20:51, Monday, 17th of March. Knight Jin Seh-Hahn has been officially declared as killed in action.”

Not a single camera flash went off. As the sounds of falling rain sorrowfully echoed in this lonely place, reporters lowered their heads in heavy silence.



Officially, Jin Seh-Hahn was dead. And the aftermath was as Kim Yu-Sohn had predicted – ‘a hero’s death would ignite the spark of hope in the masses’.

A nationwide, nay, a worldwide mourning took place to remember his passing.

Within the open arena in front of the historic Gwang-hwamun Gate, civilians voluntarily built a platform for people to come and pay their respects to Jin Seh-Hahn.

The headlines appearing on various newspapers around the world portrayed him as a hero and competed hard against one another to get the latest news out. All the while, the Korean government was deliberating on whether to give the man a national funeral or not.

“Jin Seh-Hahn died a true hero. But the legacy of his life where he gave it all to the bitter end for the good of everyone and the society at large, as well as the martial art school founded in his honour, Jin Mudo, will continue to shine in our world.”

Currently, this was the Gwang-hwamun Gate where a memorial service was being held in honour of Jin Seh-Hahn. Innumerable amount of people had gathered here, shedding tears and listening to the words of remembrance.

‘Seriously, hasn’t this blown out of proportions too much now?!’

Kim Sae-Jin had come here along with Yu Sae-Jung, but he just couldn’t get rid of this fear of things snowballing out of control.

“A star... has fallen.” (Yu Sae-Jung)

The service had come to its conclusion; Yu Sae-Jung leaned against Sae-Jin’s shoulders and murmured in a lonely voice. Since Sae-Jin had no clue what to say here, he simply nodded his head.

“That guy, I hear he will be inducted into the Hall of Fame.” (Yu Sae-Jung)

“...Really?”

“Ng.”

Getting inducted into the Hall of Fame was perhaps the greatest medal of honour a Knight could hope to receive, so much so that it was often called the Nobel Prize for the Knights.

As Knights from the entire world were scrutinised and selected, there had only ever been five Knights from Korea to be inducted into this Hall of Fame so far.

“That’s nice,” said Sae-Jin as he placed a chrysanthemum flower in front of Jin Seh-Hahn’s portrait.

“...I hope you can find never-ending happiness over there.” (Yu Sae-Jung)

Not thinking about anything, he stood there in a ‘silent prayer’ mode, but then, heard Yu Sae-Jung’s way-too serious voice from the side. He was somehow able to hold back a wry smile from breaking out.



Another two weeks passed by since then.

When the emotional memorial services came to their natural end, rational questions and suspicions began rising in the public’s minds. Just who were the ringleaders behind the death of Jin Seh-Hahn?

The rage of the public and Knights began to boil over when ‘someone’ posited that the Vampires were the ones responsible.

Sure enough, a public demonstration took place, with its attendees demanding the

extermination of Vampires. And even the president of the country, in the televised speech, clearly expressed his regret and anger, promising to uncover the true villains and make them answer for their crimes.

And so, on a certain early morning, when not a single day of peace had passed by in a while.

A bluish light and the slightly cold air woke Sae-Jin up from his sleep. The bed next to him felt empty so he looked around, and found Yu Sae-Jung busy applying make-up so early in the morning.

“...Are you going somewhere?” (Sae-Jin)

He asked as he yawned out loudly.

“Ng.”

A woman applying make-up was at her most busiest. But still, her short answer kind of stuck a needle in him.

“What’s the occasion? And where are you going to?” (Sae-Jin)

“To a ball.” (Yu Sae-Jung)

“...Huh?”

Sae-Jin narrowed his eyes. She said she was going to a ‘ball’ – first of all, something didn’t quite sound right. No, it stank, actually. After all, in a ball, didn’t men and women dance together or some such?

“And why are you going there?” (Sae-Jin)

“Mm? Oh, it’s nothing, really. It’s actually a gathering of top 100 businesses in the country, but... because of the recent incident, it’s going to be really boring, I think.” (Yu Sae-Jung)

“...Really? But why are you getting ready alone? Can’t I come with you?” *(TL: Yeah, why can’t he? I mean, his Guild probably makes way more moolah than some of those “top 100” businesses if one seriously thinks about it.)*

He scratched the back of his neck while asking her. Yu Sae-Jung made an apologetic smile and shook her head slowly.

“I also wanna do that, but... my dad and grandpa will be there, too.”

“...”

Kim Sae-Jin’s eyes became even more narrower. For some weird reason, Yu Sae-Jung didn’t want to introduce him to her father and grandfather. Weird, since both of them didn’t even object to their relationship.

“Well, fine. Actually, I also am going to meet someone today. A woman, as a matter of fact.” (Sae-Jin)

“...What?”

Having his ego properly poked with a needle, Sae-Jin launched his own low-blow counterattack. That caused Yu Sae-Jung to furrow her brows and react seriously.

“Why? And with who?” (Yu Sae-Jung)

“I promised Miss Hazeline a good meal, you see. Why? Am I not allowed to go?” (Sae-Jin)

“Ah~~. Nope. It’s okay. Have fun.”

“...Eh?”

However, she was unexpectedly easy-going with her reply. Seeing this, Kim Sae-Jin couldn’t help but be dazed slightly. He was joking about the meal thing, actually...

“Oppa should meet up with her and console her properly, you know? I mean, Unni must be suffering a lot right now.” (Yu Sae-Jung)

“...?”

A question mark floated on top of Sae-Jin’s head. Console her? She was suffering? What the heck was she suddenly talking about...?

“Seriously, her lover passed on like that, so... can you imagine how hurt she is right

now? Oppa needs to properly help her out, you know. Ah, right. You don't have to do it too properly, though."

Finishing up with beautifying herself already, she got up from her seat and lightly tapped on Sae-Jin's shoulder. She then put on a coat, picked up her handbag, and left the bedroom.

Stuck in a total daze, Sae-Jin's eyes chased after her departing back. Hazeline's lover... What the hell was that all about?

"...Could it be?!"

Suddenly, a thought flashed by in his mind so he quickly accessed his phone, still not completely convinced of the possibility.

He couldn't find anything remotely like what Yu Sae-Jung was talking about in the regular portal sites, but... on the forums of the Dawn's official page, it was the hottest topic being discussed there.

A tragic but passionate love story between an Elf and a certain Knight, that was.

CHAPTER 120

SORTING OUT THE FEELINGS (1)

The origin of this tale was a post uploaded to the Dawn's forums by a Knight who just happened to be around to witness the final moments of Jin Seh-Hahn. The post itself was nothing but pure guesswork about the unrealistic love between an Elf and the fallen Knight.

And to make the matters a bit more worse than before, several Knights poured more oil to the flames – saying such things as an Elf frequenting Jin Seh-Hahn's home, etc, etc. And then... a gossip-loving female Knight decided to 'sort out' all those little snippets of posts and ended up compiling a romance novel in the process.

And so, the two protagonists in this story morphed into full-blown lovers who were planning to get married soon.

This pure work of fiction was even being recommended by over 640 members of the Dawn Order – which was crazy, considering there were only around 800 Knights affiliated with it. In other words, it seemed like it was only a matter of time before this 'novel' would find its way to the hands of the public...

"This, were you aware of this?" (Sae-Jin)

Inside the coffee shop owned by TM.

Sae-Jin got bored while waiting for that ball/high-society party Yu Sae-Jung was suppose to attend, which he planned to sneak in and 'sightsee' later – or, more correctly, to spy on her – so, called up Hazeline who was living nearby to kill some time.

"Mm... Kind of." (Hazeline)

She calmly replied with a smile. She was as pleased as punch at being called by him out of the blue, but Sae-Jin's brows were deeply furrowed in a show of his unhappiness.

"Ah... Actually, I couldn't really deny it, and you'll see why I couldn't. Sae-Jung was

asking me with such an ardent fervor... How can I deny it when she texted me [I didn't know, Unni. I'm so, sorry] with this crying emoji?"

She pulled out her phone and showed the text in question to Sae-Jin.

"...Hmm."

For sure, it seemed that Yu Sae-Jung sent the text while under the heavy clouds of emotions. Did she send it right after reading those fictitious posts? However, there were a lot of typos. She must've sent it after having a stiff glass or two. Maybe more.

"But still, we shouldn't say Jin Seh-Hahn and Miss Hazeline were having a relationship, you know." (Sae-Jin)

Sae-Jin said half-jokingly, but Hazeline nodded her head somewhat unexpectedly.

"No wait. That doesn't sound so bad." (Hazeline)

"Eh? No, hang on a minute. Please don't joke around. When reporters come around asking questions, please say it's all a misunderstanding." (Sae-Jin)

A question mark floated on top of her head as she tilted it in confusion.

"But why? It doesn't matter since Jin Seh-Hahn is dead, right?" (Hazeline)

"...Actually, it does matter, since I gotta tell Sae-Jung that I'm Jin Seh-Hahn sooner or later. You can probably imagine how awkward that conversation is going to be, right?" (Sae-Jin)

"Why would you tell her that?" (Hazeline)

"Of course I have to tell her. She's my girlfriend." (Sae-Jin)

"....."

Hearing his words, Hazeline quietly bit down on her lips. She remained silent after that, just tapping on the coffee table with the tip of her finger. Five minutes, ten, then fifteen... some length of time had passed by, yet all she did was to continuously let out several heavy sighs.

“...Miss Hazeline?”

“Yes, yes. How nice it is to be Sae-Jung... After all, you’re her boyfriend.”

She finally said something, then loudly slammed her palm down on the table’s surface, before roughly standing up. Sae-Jin shuddered a little, but since she still hadn’t given him a definite answer yet, he too got up and chased after her.

“Where are you going now?” (Sae-Jin)

“I’m going to a place for dinner.” (Hazeline)

“...With who?” (Sae-Jin)

“With you.” (Hazeline)

In a show of confidence, she jabbed her forefinger at his chest as if she had already called dibs on eating out with him or something.

“What are you ta...”

“Didn’t you say there’s still plenty of time left until that party begins? Then, why not spend it with me?” (Hazeline)

“...No, wait a second here.”

“Then, I’ll give it a more serious thought, whether I’ll deny the rumour or not.”

Sae-Jin took a sneaky glance at his wristwatch after deliberating it for a bit. Thankfully, the clock hands still hovered around 5. But Hazeline powerfully snatched his wrist, and glared at him with a pair of chilly eyes covered by her hood.

“Are you coming or not?” (Hazeline)

“Ah, well, since there is still some time left, so...”

“Then, follow me.”

Khwang, khwang, khwang

While still tightly gripping Sae-Jin's wrist, she stomped her way in a hurry.

Arriving next to his car before long, she grabbed the door handle and began an epic struggle to open it. But it didn't budge an inch, so she drummed on the door and spoke in irritation.

"Please unlock the door." (Hazeline)

"..."

Bleep

Sae-Jin chuckled slightly as he pressed a button on the car's key. That caused the car's door to open not sideways, but rise up to the sky.

"...Looks like you changed the car again. You must be loaded with money now." (Hazeline)

Hazeline complained audibly as she climbed into the passenger seat. Sae-Jin expertly slid into the driver's.

"Are we going to that place, the one we go to all the time?" (Sae-Jin)

"Nope. Not that one. Let's go somewhere else. There is this place I know." (Hazeline)

She suddenly accessed the car's satnav. The destination was only about ten minutes away – pretty close by.

"By the way..." (Sae-Jin)

"It's going to be fine. There aren't too many people there. It opens a bit later than usual, and as I frequent the place, I know it quite well. Even Sae-Jung's been there a few times before, too." (Hazeline)

"Oh. Well, in that case... Wait, what? Sae-Jung was there too? Why would she be there, in the middle of the night...?"

"She probably wanted to unwind and relax. For now, please get going already." (Hazeline)

“...Keum.”

Vrrrrroung...

When he pressed down on the accelerator, a throaty exhaust note filled the cabin.

And the sports car only needed three minutes to arrive at the restaurant. No, he thought it was a restaurant, but...

“...Isn’t this a bar?!” (Sae-Jin)

“Yes, it is. I told you already, yes? That it opens its doors a bit late.”

This was no bloody restaurant – instead, it was a stylish and luxurious bar.

“They also serve food. In fact, I’ll make it for you.”

She entered the bar first. Sae-Jin followed her footsteps with a slightly uneasy expression. He wasn’t too worried, though – as long as Mana circulated within his body, he’d never get drunk anyways.



“Actually, this is the magic-infused liquor.” (Hazeline)

The moment he heard Hazeline’s words, all his confidence shattered into bits and pieces, only to be replaced by the feelings of uncertainty.

“You should have told me sooner...” (Sae-Jin)

“The motto here is ‘drinks that can even get Knights drunk’. That’s why, the bar’s been named ‘You Will Get Drunk’...*Hiccup!!*”

Thankfully, Sae-Jin was only at the level of feeling a bit tipsy, but in Hazeline’s case, it was turning into a potentially serious problem. She had discarded her robe a long time ago and now it was nowhere to be seen, and her face was flushed crimson red.

“...Ah, damn. Would you look at the time already? Looks like I must get going...” (Sae-Jin)

To be perfectly honest, he had no confidence when it came to alcohol. All the dangerous mistakes happened under its influences, after all.

“Mister Sae-Jin. There is something I must seriously talk to you about.”

However, Hazeline grabbed his wrist again as he tried to get up. Her own hands were trembling, and her downcast eyes were moist. He had no choice but to sit back down. He consoled himself by thinking... all he had to do was avoid getting drunk.

“What... is it?” (Sae-Jin)

He sighed out and asked her.

Hazeline took another sip of her drink, and then, slowly moved her mouth. From between her wet lips, her trembling voice leaked out.

It sure was her trademarked beautiful voice no matter where it was heard, but Sae-Jin’s expression was getting stiffer and stiffer as he listened.



The time now was late, late afternoon, the last lights of sun fading over the Western horizon. An ultra-luxurious cruise liner operated by TM was anchored off the coast of the now-calm East Sea. The sight of countless lights that glittered on deck, as well as many waiters kitted out in neat tuxedos, imparted the atmosphere with the air of great importance and high class even when viewed from afar.

As this was a party held biennially, the names on the guest list were indeed quite varied, to say the least. Some who hadn’t been invited before had come, while some who had been invited before, were disqualified from attending this year.

“We welcome you aboard.”

As the time for the ball drew closer, and the waiters busily greeted the newly-arriving guests – Sae-Jin in the Leviathan Form was swimming around the cruise liner under the water’s surface.

Actually, this wasn’t his original plan. No, he was going to attend this party as a human and surprise Yu Sae-Jung in the process. After all, his TM had entered the ranks of top 100 companies so he was more than qualified to do so.

However, after listening to the drunk Hazeline's words earlier today, his mind was in somewhat of a turmoil. She definitely did not confess to him. But he wasn't a completely hopeless half-wit who could not recognise the depths of her feelings contained within her voice, either.

"...A pleasure to make your acquaintance, Miss Yu Sae-Jung."

It was then, he heard someone mention Yu Sae-Jung's name. Sae-Jin slowly opened his eyes and carefully swam closer to the surface.

He spotted Yu Sae-Jung on deck. It hadn't even been three minutes since she arrived, but hell, she was surrounded by quite a hefty crowd already. They were all rather good-looking men and women from the families of the top 100 companies.

They were trying very hard to appeal to her sensibilities, but unfortunately, she only flashed a polite smile to deal with them. Even then, not long after, she pulled the time-worn excuse of making a prior engagement with someone else and swiftly evacuated from there.

Sae-Jin slowly tailed her underwater. She seemed to be quite used to walking in high heels now. She made her way towards the railings overlooking the silent ocean and deeply gazed at it in contemplation.

She looked rather lonesome, standing there. So, Sae-Jin created a weak ripple on the surface for her. Yu Sae-Jung quietly closed her eyes as the salty scent of the sea and the gentle sway of the waves entered her mind.

But even that respite didn't last long. An unknown older gentleman was slowly approaching her.

Sae-Jin wasn't worried, at least not initially. He thought that, here comes yet another fool who will end up tasting the bitterness of embarrassment courtesy of Yu Sae-Jung. However... out of the blue, she formed an affectionate smile as if she was waiting for this man's arrival while turning around to greet him.

'...What the hell.'

Momentarily, the sea swayed noticeably – the result of his unconscious reaction after losing his calm at this new development. She was greeting this unknown man with as much affection as she would show him.

Before he could lose his mind, though – Sae-Jin did his best to remain cool, and pushed both his sight and hearing to absolute maximum. The previously-dark view brightened up, and he could hear the conversation of the two on deck.

“And how goes your painting lately, uncle?” (Yu Sae-Jung)

The moment Sae-Jin heard these words, he truly felt grateful for that persistent slim strand of patience he held onto – if he had lost his cool and jumped aboard to intervene, then he’d been seen as a proper idiot by everyone by now.

“It’s going well. You should come visit my gallery opening later on.”

“Fuhut. Of course.” (Yu Sae-Jung)

This man’s face kind of resembled the calm ocean – vivid creases on his face and the deep, dark navy blue hair seemed to be the reason for that.

“By the way, Sae-Jung. I’ve heard from the rumours doing the rounds that you’ve been dating Kim Sae-Jin.”

“...Yes. We’ve been going out for a while now.” (Yu Sae-Jung)

Yu Sae-Jung replied with a strangely lonely expression, which made Sae-Jin feel guilty, his body trembling slightly under the water’s surface.

“But I didn’t hear anything from the media?”

“No one would be daring enough to publish that story, without receiving our blessings in the first place. I mean, if you happen to cross both the Dawn and The Monster, then you wouldn’t be able to set foot back in Korea, after all.”

The man smiled slightly and nodded his head. Then, he turned his gaze back towards the ocean – as if to commit to memory whatever he saw lurking underneath the water’s surface.

“I honestly never imagined that you’d actually start dating someone.”

“...I was really conceited back then, that’s why. I’ve grown up a lot after meeting Oppa.”
(Yu Sae-Jung)

“No, no. Not that. That’s not what I meant, you know? Didn’t you say you’d only marry me and no one else?”

Yu Sae-Jung let out a short chuckle as if she found his suggestion unbelievable.

“Just how long ago did I say that...? Seriously, uncle. You’re making me laugh.” (Yu Sae-Jung)

“Hahaha. It’s my sense of humour that attracted my wife. Probably.”

“No wa~y. There’s no way, methinks.” (Yu Sae-Jung)

Two of them shared a warm laughter together.

But the smiles only lasted for a short moment. His face hardened slightly and studied Yu Sae-Jung’s side-on appearance. He seemed worried for her.

“However... are you guys definitely in ‘love’?”

“...Well, yes. I do love him. I’ve never felt like this before in my entire life, and I don’t think I’ll ever feel this way, ever again.” (Yu Sae-Jung)

Yu Sae-Jung replied right away. Sae-Jin should have been happy hearing those words, yet... they felt like needles pricking his skin.

“But... Oppa’s feelings, I think, aren’t as clear as mine. Maybe, I love him a lot more than he does me. I mean, I’m just thankful for being able to have him by my side, you see.”

“Is that so?”

“Yes. Therefore, I’m different from you, uncle. So, please do not worry about me.” (Yu Sae-Jung)

“...I’d like to do exactly that, as well.”

The man answered her in a calm manner.

There were no other words exchanged after that.

Within this silence, the two of them enjoyed this sense of comfortable familiarity shared between them.

With a good timing, a gentle wave swept by.

They stood there quietly and appreciated the beautiful reflections off the rippling surface of the ocean.



Four days later, Thursday.

There was a huge throng of Knights as well as reporters filling up the main auditorium of the Raven Knights Order. All these people had gathered for a ‘small’ event that would only last 5, 10 minutes tops. But this event was important enough to tug at their interest really hard – a weapon conferment ceremony.

Normally, such a ceremony only happened when a famous Knight bought something from a famous master Blacksmith. The Knights Order would hold it in order to advertise/boast that one of their Knights had purchased such a wonderful weapon.

However... the Raven Order had never held one until now, saying something or rather about their reputation and stuff.

The reason such a famous Order would voluntarily break out of their own tradition, was all because the master Blacksmith involved here was Kim Sae-Jin, as well as the rumour mill indicating that the rank of this new weapon could be a “Treasure”.

“...Congratulations.”

Inside the waiting room behind the auditorium’s stage, the Raven Order’s Master Kim Hyun-Seok congratulated Kim Yu-Rin while looking rather dispirited.

“What the... Your subordinate is acquiring a good weapon by getting into a heavy debt, yet you’re getting jealous of her?” (Kim Yu-Rin)

Kim Yu-Rin jokingly replied to him while smiling slyly. Kim Hyun-Seok shook his head, his expression slightly showing his guilt.

“No, not true. I am truly happy for you. By the way, what’s the name of this weapon?”

(Kim Hyun-Seok)

“According to Guild Master Kim Sae-Jin, it’s going to be Gungnir.” (Kim Yu-Rin)

“...Gungnir, huh?”

The legendary Gungnir – the weapon of the leader of all the gods residing in Asgard, Odin. It seemed that Kim Sae-Jin dared to pilfer yet another name of a legendary weapon.

“But, isn’t your main weapon a sword? Although I don’t know the legend all that well, I’m sure ‘Gungnir’ is a spear of some kind.”

“Ah, that is... Apparently, it’s a sword that can substitute a spear easily. He said that it can fire several highly accurate light arrows that will work well along with my Trait.”
(Kim Yu-Rin)

“...Is that right? Hmph. So, it was tailor made for you.”

Kim Hyun-Seok scratched his chin and mumbled in slight dissatisfaction. Kim Yu-Rin looked at that and giggled to herself. Her father could be the most stern-looking man if he wanted to, but sometimes, he did kinda look like a little boy and that sure was adorable.

“By the way... if we are talking about legendary weapons, which one is superior – Gungnir, or Gram?” (Kim Hyun-Seok)

“Uh, well, that is... Ah, it’s going to start now. Shall we go?” (Kim Yu-Rin)

Of course, it’s Gungnir, thought Kim Yu-Rin as she chuckled inwardly, while leading Kim Hyun-Seok out the waiting room.

“Uh? Oh, yes. Let us.”

Two of them opened the door and stepped onto the stage. At the same time, claps of the proud Raven Knights resounded within the auditorium.

As she waved her hands towards the audience, she found a literal treasure chest sitting pretty in the middle of the stage. Although her weapon was still hidden within that chest, she couldn’t help but feel deeply affected by the overwhelming aura oozing off

from it.

That's mine, all mine~~.

Totally entranced, Kim Yu-Rin floated like a butterfly towards the chest – figuratively speaking, of course.

CHAPTER 121

SORTING OUT THE FEELINGS (2)

From this way and that, Kim Yu-Rin began studying the treasure chest covered in black sheet. No matter which direction she observed it from, she was certain of the fact that the powerful aura oozing out of the box was definitely coming off from a bona fide treasure hidden within.

Finally~, I'm going to be the second person in here ever to own a Treasure-grade weapon...

As she basked in the feeling of an endless contentment, suddenly the sword hanging by her hips entered into her thought process.

This high-ranked sword had been by her side for a very, very long time – the ‘White Night’.

It was a reward bestowed unto her by the Raven Order when she became the youngest upper Mid Tier Knight in the history many years ago. She survived many deadly crises since then with it by her side, and saved just as many lives along the way as well.

In other words, this sword truly had a priceless sentimental value to her, the one that shared her history of sweat, blood and tears, as well as all those good and bad memories she experienced as a Knight.

‘...I’m sure you’ll prefer to spend the rest of your days in comfort inside a good museum.’

She slowly patted her white sword and swallowed her saliva down, feeling the complicated emotions sweep over her. All those days she’d been fighting with the White Night in hand flashed by her mind like a roll of a film.

“Oh, oh. He’s here.”

A man stepped on to the stage while Kim Yu-Rin was busy sorting through her mixed feelings that was born out of her separation from the White Night.

That man was naturally Kim Sae-Jin, wearing a smart suit that looked expensive but not too extrovert and eye-catching.

Several ladies – Knights, no less – in the audience began blushing noticeably at his entrance, while the male counterparts were busy dreaming up of ways to get close to him as they noisily cheered on.

Although he was met by all this wonderful reception, Sae-Jin was actually under quite a bit of stress lately, thanks to several worrisome developments of last couple of days. He forced himself to assume a stiff smile, as he approached the waiting father and daughter pair of Kim Yu-Rin and Kim Hyun-Seok.

“Nice to meet you.” (Kim Hyun-Seok)

Kim Hyun-Seok reached out with his hand extended first. Kim Sae-Jin lowered his head in a show of respect and shook the older man’s hand.

“It’s my honour to meet the Korea’s greatest Knight.” (Sae-Jin)

“...No, actually it’s my honour. After all, there is no one who is more accomplished than you in your age group, the 20s.” (Kim Hyun-Seok)

“Not at all. With Miss Kim Yu-Rin standing right besides me, I’m not deserving of such a praise.” (Sae-Jin)

“Mm? Ah. Knight Kim Yu-Rin has already entered her 30s now. She’s not in her 20s anymore, haven’t for a long time.” (Kim Hyun-Seok)

Kim Yu-Rin’s shoulders shook in visible shock at this unexpectedly fatal low-blow that was aimed squarely at her heart. Fearing that other Knights might have heard this completely thoughtless and unnecessary remark of Kim Hyun-Seok, she quickly surveyed the surroundings with a horrified expression clearly etched on her face.

Several Knights knew enough to tactfully lower their gazes when her eyes landed on them.

“...Why would you say such a thing in public?!” (Kim Yu-Rin)

She angrily confronted her father/boss with a really pissed-off face. It seemed that she was ready to kill him if it came down to that.

The sensitive topics of ‘age’ and ‘weight’ were incredibly prickly subjects to talk about for ladies, indeed...

“Hahah...” (Kim Hyun-Seok)

“I’m asking you, why did you say that out aloud? Would you feel good if I called you a 50-something geezer in front of everyone?!” (Kim Yu-Rin)

“Ahahahah...” (Kim Hyun-Seok)

Kim Hyun-Seok glossed over the teeth-gritting Kim Yu-Rin’s angry mutterings and walked towards the treasure chest along with Sae-Jin. Because, now was the time for the photo op.

“Say cheese~~!” (Cameraman)

Sae-Jin forced out another smile towards the camera lens as he stood next to Kim Hyun-Seok.

With a soft *click*, a flash went off.

“We’re going to take a couple more pictures, but will you be alright with that?” (Kim Hyun-Seok)

“Pardon? Uh, sure. I’m fine with that.” (Sae-Jin)

Sae-Jin inwardly thought, *just how many can they possibly take? Can’t be that many anyways.*

Unfortunately for Sae-Jin, it didn’t take too long for him to realise the errors in his lackadaisical judgement.

In order to show off the fact that the Raven “possessed two Treasures crafted by the world’s best Blacksmith, Kim Sae-Jin”, he had to take literally countless photos with many people.

It began with taking a couple with only Kim Hyun-Seok. Next, with Kim Hyun-Seok and Kim Yu-Rin, then followed by Hyun-Seok, Yu-Rin, as well as other high-ranking officials of the Order. Next, with those same officials, sans Hyun-Seok and Yu-Rin. Finally, ones with all the respective captains of each of the Knight Teams.

If it was the Raven of the past, they would have never raised a fuss to such an extent. All this show of prestige wasn't simply because the Dawn had been chasing them down hard.

Due to the frequent breakout of the Monster-related incidents throughout the world and the subsequent dispatching of Knights to literally everywhere, the national borders that normally demarcated the operational jurisdictions of the Knights Orders became rather blurred.

The competition, in other words, now included the rest of the world.

Whatever the case was, Sae-Jin was feeling really terrible after taking so many pictures. And to compound his misery even further, his photoshoot partners simply had way too many things to say to him. To see them forcibly shoving their business cards to him for the umpteenth time, hoping to receive Sae-Jin's famed platinum card in return, it was becoming so...

'...Hell, we haven't even opened the damn chest yet.' (Sae-Jin)

Inwardly feeling rather worried about this circus continuing on even after the unveiling of the weapon, Sae-Jin took the last photo and also, pocketed the 30th business card he received.

"And we shall begin the ceremony now." (Announcer)

As the conferment ceremony finally got underway, Kim Hyun-Seok and other unrelated parties climbed off the stage, leaving Sae-Jin and Kim Yu-Rin behind, as well as the lone treasure chest.

"I'd like to thank you for this incredible treasure..." (Kim Yu-Rin)

"I haven't even opened the lid yet, you know? You can lavish it praises a bit later, Miss Yu-Rin."

Sae-Jin smirked a little as he replied to Kim Yu-Rin. Before this, she said she preferred dolls over weapons, but hell, it seemed that a mere weapon was incomparable to a true Treasure even to her.

"Then, shall we take a look?" (Sae-Jin)

SFX for covers being pulled off

Sae-Jin lifted the veil off the chest. Immediately, the blinding light came out from the chest itself. Kim Yu-Rin nervously swallowed her saliva, wondering if the chest's price tag was just as eye-poppingly expensive as well.

"Ah, I'm asking this just in case... Have you gotten over your crush, Miss Yu-Rin?" (Sae-Jin)

"...Excuse me?"

Kim Yu-Rin woke up from her dazed staring of the chest and asked out in a shocked surprise. He smiled wryly and whispered to her.

"The Orc. The Hero Orc. You've gotten over it?"

"Wwwwhat on earth are you talking about?!?! It's not 'gotten over it' since there was nothing to get over with in the first place!!" (Kim Yu-Rin)

When Kim Yu-Rin suddenly cried out at the top of her lungs on the stage, it naturally drew the attention of the audience.

"...It never was like that. Really." (Kim Yu-Rin)

Feeling ashamed by that sudden outburst, she lowered her voice and whispered to him.

Of course, the Orc sometimes still appeared within her dreams – his un-Orc-like handsome face, his charming baritone voice, his broad and dependable back, and his perfect muscles, all of it...

"Such a thing never happened. Never." (Kim Yu-Rin)

It had been over 3 months since she last saw the Orc, so a certain sense of longing, a desire, to see him occasionally reared its head, but... Now, she was completely fine with it.

"Well, in that case, I am genuinely relieved to hear that." (Sae-Jin)

Kim Sae-Jin muttered so, as he opened the chest.

And residing within its cavity, there was a mystical, dignified weapon exuding a brilliantly blinding light that was hundreds of times purer than what the chest emitted just now.

Seeing that smooth, perfectly-formed shape from the scabbard all the way down to its hilt, Kim Yu-Rin was in a total daze – until, she spotted a peculiar little detail.

‘That insignia.’

It was a certain tiny mark, a small engraving of sorts, that Sae-Jin would unconsciously leave behind when he was completely focused or immersed in the crafting process of a Treasure, or a Branded Goods graded 1st or 2nd.

“ ... ”

She looked at that mark and recalled the Hero Orc’s mace. She remembered seeing a very similar mark somewhere on the roundish hitting surface of his scary mace. She was dead sure of it. After all, she dueled with him hundreds of time already.

“You like it that much?” (Sae-Jin)

Sae-Jin asked her with a satisfied smile after mistaking her dazed state for something else.

Kim Yu-Rin quickly swallowed down her saliva and turned her gaze towards him.

Sae-Jin’s smile remained etched on his lips, even when her questioning stare firmly landed on him.



[With this weapon conferment ceremony, the general feelings of the populace is that Knight Kim Yu-Rin has received the figurative ‘Sky Piercer Halberd’ and the only thing she now lacks is the ‘Red Hare’. But what are you thoughts regarding this?] *(TL: This is some obscure reference to the ‘Romance of the Three Kingdoms. Not sure what the relevance here is, but there you go. If anyone reading this out there is a proper RoTK expert, do comment below. BTW, Red Hare is a horse. Go figure. Also, this horse and the halberd were both owned by Lü Bu.)*

[Hahah... that is a rather apt description. However, in case of the Red Hare, or more

correctly, a Griffin – I hear that the Raven Knights Order is also trying to lease one for the period of ten years... But in all honesty, it all depends on Kim Sae-Jin's decision, so it's not certain at the moment.] [Is that so? Currently, if I'm not mistaken, it's only the Dawn Order who have successfully leased the Griffins?] [Correct. Well, the Dawn have enjoyed the most friendly relationship with Kim Sae-Jin, so... I fear, no matter how much other Knights Orders try to win over his attention, they will be unable to surpass that unbreakable bond formed from the very beginning, when he was still struggling at the very bottom. On top of this, he had given a Treasure-grade sword to the Dawn's most recognised Knight, Yu Sae-Jung, for free. It's a whole different relationship to the Raven, whom he asked for money.] [Oh-ho. I wasn't aware of that. Anyhow, it is truly a surprising thing – to think, that one single man can somehow influence the prestige of an Order as well as the status of a Knight. I mean, the Daebaek Order, who used to be a bit underwhelming to be called an important player, have grown in status and now they are threatening Goryeo's position in the rankings solely by maximising their relationship with Kim Sae-Jin, aren't they?] [Indeed. It's not for nothing many civilians are calling that man the Saviour. For sure, that nickname did start off as a sort-of attempt to ridicule him because of his wonderful Trait, but now... Now, without Kim Sae-Jin and The Monster Guild, the nation of Korea would find itself in a very difficult situation. After all, TM has taken over 50% of the artifact, weapons, and potion markets by themselves now.]

Hazeline was currently lying on a jet-black bed like a corpse. For almost the whole week, the only activities she forced herself to perform were sleeping, waking up, check up on her phone, watch TV and when she felt hungry, eat something... She was living like a zombie.

It couldn't be helped, since she could recall that huge mistake she made under the influence of alcohol, whenever she tried to do something, causing her to regret it with all of her being.

She was always like this – failing to rein in her wild emotions and then, regretting like crazy over the resulting spilt milk.

Besides, although she tried her best to not to think about it, it proved to be an impossible task. Turning on the TV and there it was, Kim Sae-Jin's face, every single damn day.

And when she heard about him giving Kim Yu-Rin a sword, that sort of made her feel disappointed as well. He hadn't even made a Wizard's wand for her yet.

“.....Wow, I’m such an incorrigible idiot.”

She shook her head hard and turned the TV off.

Her feelings towards Kim Sae-Jin, she had decided it would stay as nothing more than a favourable impression. But it was much more than that now.

And the biggest reason for that was her spending 3,4 times a week with Sae-Jin disguised as Jin Seh-Hahn. She was such an idiot to actively go and see him. She knew very well things would turn out this way, yet her reasoning got suppressed by her emotions and therefore, she couldn’t stop. And so, her feelings that had ballooned into something far more dangerous, ended up doing something terribly idiotic. Thankfully, it wasn’t a direct confession or anything, but still...

– By the way, why did you have to kill off Jin Seh-Hahn? If he hadn’t died, then I’d be able to stay with him, you know.

– I wonder, doesn’t it get a bit stale seeing only one girl all the time? I hear all men feel that way. It’s not too late now, you know? You can resurrect Jin Seh-Hahn with a poof, and then, and then...

“Kkyaaaack!!”

Too embarrassed to recall the final bits of her drunken utterance, Hazeline instead screamed her lungs out.

She still couldn’t believe the fact that she had blurted out a total bull dust containing her ‘legit’ desires during the moment when her reasoning and logic had fled from her brain.

What an idiot, a nutcase, a dumbass – the enemy of all alcohol kind.

Hazeline started kicking and punching her bed until it was nearly broken, out of sheer frustration and regret, but before long, she was sneakily lifting up her phone. She accessed the app for private chatting and began spying on one of the profile pics there.

However, she tossed the phone away on top of the bed after a short time had passed by.

On the screen of the phone lying on the corner of her bed, was the profile pic of Yu

Sae-Jung. It was a selfie of her smiling happily while leaning against Sae-Jin's shoulder.

"...I'm so envious."

Hazeline was totally envious of Yu Sae-Jung. She also felt angry.

For sure, she met Sae-Jin before anyone else. If she was more proactive back then... Then, the person next to him would have been her, instead. She felt regret, anger, wronged, and disappointed.

'...I wanna see him.'

She crawled on the bed towards the phone and pulled up someone else's profile image, enlarging it on the screen.

This time, a 'flawless' image of Sae-Jin filled up the entire screen.



It was now Spring.

Kim Sae-Jin went to speak to Kim Yu-Sohn.

"Nosferatu, you say?" (Kim Sun-Ho)

"Yes. I think I need to go and meet them, at least once." (Sae-Jin)

"...By yourself only?" (Kim Sun-Ho)

But it wasn't the old man, but his son. Sae-Jin nodded his head, and although Kim Sun-Ho was rather worried about this, after seeing his boss's determination, he couldn't do anything but to nod his head along as well.

"...Well, in that case, I'll send a couple of operatives out and look for their whereabouts." (Kim Sun-Ho)

"No, wait. I don't think that's necessary – there should be an information provided to us by an anonymous source not too long ago. You should ask Mister Yu-Sohn about it." (Sae-Jin)

In the past, there was that time when an anonymous source sent in a bunch of photos and coordinates of an underground village located within a mountainside, saying it was Vampires' hideout. However, seeing that Bathory and her cahoots were busy slumming it out in a hotel located inside the city limits, this hidden village was more than likely the sanctuary of Nosferatus, instead.

"I understand." (Kim Sun-Ho)

"Very good."

Sae-Jin nodded his head once more and got up to leave. Before he could, though, Kim Sun-Ho exhorted Sae-Jin with a certain grave matter.

"Ah, right. Guild Master, I've been receiving reports of Bathory woman being seen on the coasts of the East Sea quite frequently now. It seems that she hasn't given up, yet. There is a good possibility that she might personally get involved here, so... It might be prudent to stop swimming in the ocean as the Azure Dragon for now."

"..."

Sae-Jin let off an unhappy air at that moment. After all, he was planning to head straight to the sea and swim in order to relieve all the accumulated stress.

"...Oh, well. I'll do that, then." (Sae-Jin)

But what could he possibly do? That Bathory woman was supposed to be incredibly powerful – so, all he could do for now was to appropriately avoid her.



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